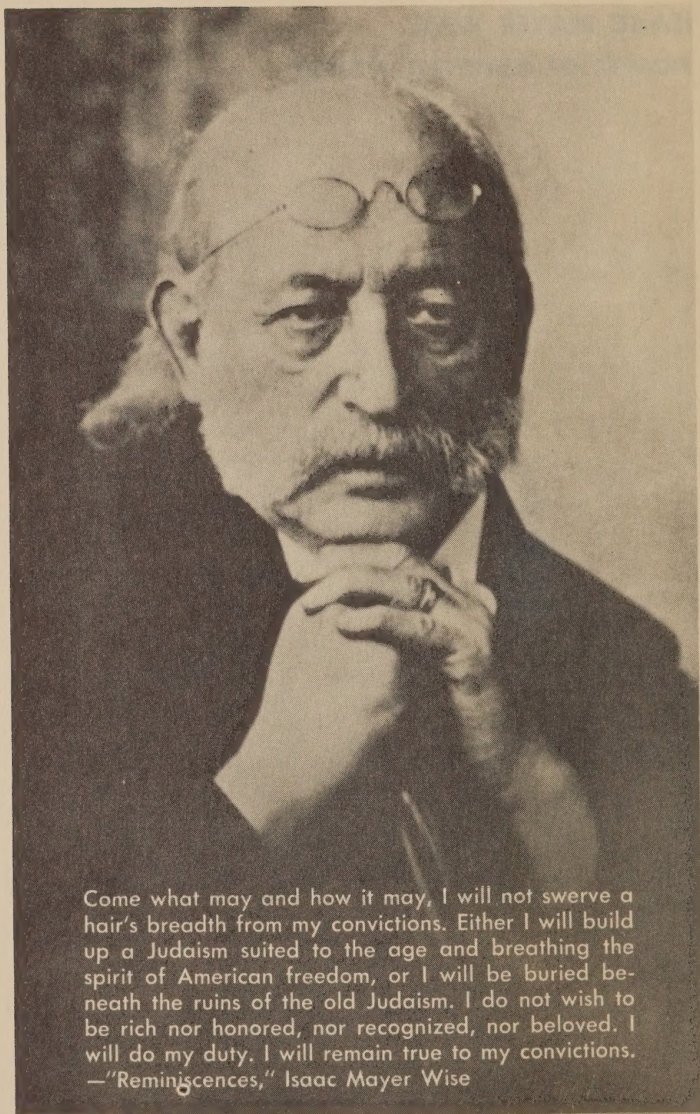


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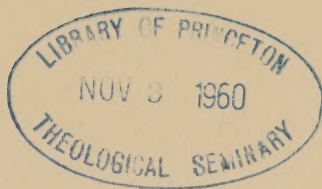
ISAAC MAYER WISE

PIONEER OF AMERICAN JUDAISM



Come what may and how it may, I will not swerve a hair's breadth from my convictions. Either I will build up a Judaism suited to the age and breathing the spirit of American freedom, or I will be buried beneath the ruins of the old Judaism. I do not wish to be rich nor honored, nor recognized, nor beloved. I will do my duty. I will remain true to my convictions.
—"Reminiscences," Isaac Mayer Wise

**PIONEER OF AMERICAN
JUDAISM**



**ISAAC
MAYER
WISE**

RABBI JOSEPH H. GUMBINER

**Union of American Hebrew Congregations
New York, N.Y.**

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Hebrew Congregations, New York 21, N.Y.

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 59-9711

Illustrated by M. YADI

Printed in the United States of America

To my dear daughter

ABIGAIL

and to the other young people who
may read this book and, reading it, may
want to become more like the kind of
person Rabbi Wise was . . .

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

FOREWORD

THIS IS THE KIND OF BOOK WHICH IS SOMETIMES CALLED A STORY biography. I have tried to make sure that the account faithfully follows the facts in general. Most of the detailed events happened just as I have described them. Some did not, but I believe they are true in the sense that they are the kind of events which really could have happened.

Perhaps this is another way of saying that I have not written a history book with an index and footnotes. Such books are very valuable but this volume is of a different sort. I have tried to tell the true story of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, not true as a snapshot reflects a person, but true as a portrait by a painter brings out the character of the subject.

For example, historians tell us that the meeting of Rabbi Wise, Daniel Webster, Judah P. Benjamin, and Lieut. Maury could not have taken place as I have described it in Chapter 8 of this book. In his *Reminiscences*, a personal diary which Rabbi Wise kept, he tells us that the dinner party and conversation took place in Washington in much the same way as I have described the scene here. Perhaps the historians are right and Rabbi Wise made a mistake about some of the details when he wrote about the event months or years later. Historians must be very careful about such things. Perhaps writers of story biographies may be a little more flexible, provided they feel sure that the main outline is correct and that the details are the kind of events which could very likely have happened under the circumstances in question. What do

you think? Do you suppose that Rabbi Wise truly felt the way he said he did about people like Daniel Webster and Judah P. Benjamin?

In preparing to write this book I read all the books written by Isaac Mayer Wise and many that were written about him. Among all these I found the following sources especially helpful: publications of the *American Jewish Archives*, under the direction of Jacob Rader Marcus; *Reminiscences* by Isaac M. Wise; *Selected Writings of Isaac Mayer Wise*, edited by David Philipson and Louis Grossman; *Isaac Mayer Wise, a Biography* by Max B. May; *American Jewry and the Civil War* by Bertram W. Korn; *The Jews of Charleston* by Charles Reznikoff; *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States* by Morris U. Schappes.

Wherever I have quoted from the Bible I have used the Jewish Publication Society of America version. Prayers are from the *Union Prayerbook* and hymns from the *Union Hymnal*, both published by the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

Photographs for the inserts were contributed through the courtesy of the American Jewish Archives and David J. Wise.

I am grateful to my friend, John Kaltenbach, for insisting that I would be able to tell this story, and for generous help during its preparation.

I have enjoyed writing this book. If you enjoy reading it you may want to look at some of the sources I have mentioned. In that case you would be able to decide for yourself about the similarity as well as the difference between books of history and story biographies.

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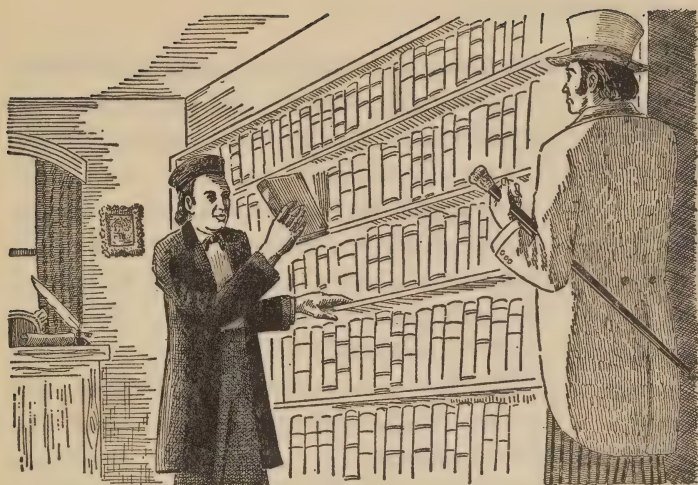
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ISAAC MAYER WISE

PIONEER OF AMERICAN JUDAISM



1. AN AMERICAN IN BOHEMIA—1846

YOUNG RABBI WISE SHIFTED UNEASILY IN HIS LEATHER CHAIR. Across the desk from him sat a young couple. Leah Peissel's dark hair was modestly covered by a shawl except for a few curls which escaped at the sides. She sat where she could see the faces of both the rabbi and Moritz, to whom she was engaged to be married. Moritz Schoenthal, young, slim, angry now as he leaned forward toward the rabbi's desk, emphasized what he wanted to say with quick gestures.

"Rabbi, this is not a fly-by-night affair. Leah and I have known each other for two years. We want to get married and I can tell you right now that we are not going to be put off by any legal nonsense. I am not the oldest boy in the family and we will not wait around like so many vultures until

someone makes a vacancy by doing us the favor of dying.”

“Take it a bit more easily, Moritz,” said Leah. “After all, you know the rabbi is not in favor of this cruel law. He will find a way to help us get around it.”

The law to which Leah Peissel referred was part of a whole system by which the Austrian government hoped to keep the people in Bohemia, including the Jews who lived there, in a state of fear and subjection. Bohemia is an area about half the size of the state of Ohio. It is situated just east of Germany and for many years the people of Bohemia had lived as free men under their own rulers. When Rabbi Wise lived there, however, Bohemia was under the rule of Austria. This foreign power dealt harshly with all the people of Bohemia and especially with the Jewish minority.

Leah looked appealingly at the rabbi. Young Isaac Mayer Wise was thinking of all the couples who had sat there before him during his two and a half years in Radnitz. The preparation for a wedding always went along smoothly enough until he asked to see their *Familiantenrecht*. This was a small paper, but it was very important because without one no Jewish couple in Bohemia was permitted to be married. The imperial authorities hoped to freeze the Jewish population of the Empire at its existing size. Unless one was the oldest son of his family he could never hope to marry until room was made by the death of some other member of the Jewish community.

Rabbi Wise spoke to Leah, “What makes you think I can find a way around the law? There is no way around it. Perhaps you have heard the rumor that I have performed my duty as a rabbi and have united young people in marriage

according to the faith of Israel even when they did not have the necessary license?"

Moritz took Leah's hand in his and answered for her. "That is exactly what we have heard, Rabbi. We admire your courage and we ask that you arrange to do the same for us."

Rabbi Wise hesitated for a moment. He touched his neatly trimmed beard and a faint smile lit up his proud face. "Why not? Why not, indeed? The Talmud does tell us that 'the law of the land is the law.' But when we suffer under unjust laws drafted for the special purpose of depriving us of human rights, I say that the law of the land is null and void. It is to the law of humanity and the law of God that we must have recourse. You may not know it, Moritz and Leah, but only last week I was called to the capital, to Prague, where a member of the Imperial Council asked me why so many children were born to Jewish parents who did not have the legal right to marry. I answered him in one sentence, 'Because of the barbarous restrictions your government has placed on the right to marry, Your Excellency.' I don't think he liked it and I no longer care.

"Now listen closely. Go to your homes. Tell no one about this except your parents. Bring them here in one hour. I shall make out the *k'subo*, the marriage contract. My wife will bring out the *chupo*, the bridal canopy. Before this night is out and in this very room I shall unite your lives in marriage according to the law of Moses and Israel, and in spite of his Imperial Majesty. Go now, and remember, tell no one except your parents."

That night Moritz and Leah exchanged their vows beneath the *chupo* in the rabbi's study, made beautiful by candlelight.

Moritz placed a wide gold band on Leah's finger and said, *Hare at m'kudeshes li*. . . . "I betroth thee to me with this ring as my wife according to the law of Moses and Israel."

Moritz crushed the wine-glass beneath his heel and took Leah in his arms. A sigh went round the room. Theresa Wise, the rabbi's wife, smiled happily. Little Emily Wise, a month old, slept peacefully in her crib. The parents of the young people shed tears. They cried in part for joy, in part at the thought of the humiliating and dangerous position of the Jewish community in Bohemia. Still, this was a night for rejoicing and they toasted the newly-married pair and each other as they drank brandy and ate little pastries which they had hastily provided when the children told them of the rabbi's decision. Rabbi Wise joined in the holiday mood.

Only his dear friend, Dr. Lewi, who had come to be a witness to the wedding, seemed troubled as he stood apart, talking to Theresa Wise, a worried look on his face. It was late when the guests left.

Rabbi Wise spent most of the next day in the school. The synagogue of Radnitz was a tidy stone building with arched windows and a six-pointed star of David rising above its roof of red clay tiles. The school and the rabbi's house were next door to the synagogue. Rabbi Wise spent most of his time in the school because he was teacher for the community as well as its spiritual leader. He taught the children their regular school subjects—reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, history—as well as the Bible and Jewish history and how to read Hebrew. So much teaching kept the rabbi very busy, and it was only after school was out in the late afternoon that he could prepare his sermons and carry on his own studies.

On the day following the marriage of Leah and Moritz, Rabbi Wise crossed the lawn to the house and entered his study. Its walls were lined with books, almost all of them written in German and Hebrew. There were the Bible, the Talmud, large volumes of commentaries, whole sets of history, and other books of all kinds. Among all these books there were a few, a very few volumes written in English. Although he could not speak English fluently, the rabbi could read it reasonably well. It was for an English book that he reached on this particular afternoon, a book about an American who had been one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, Richard Henry Lee. Rabbi Wise never tired of reading what Lee had said during the time when American statesmen debated the adoption of the federal constitution of the United States.

There was a knock on the door. Dr. Lewi, the family physician, entered. He was a young man with sandy hair and beard. He wore striped trousers, a closely fitted short frock coat, stiff white collar and small black cravat. The visitor sat down gravely, and with great care, speaking slowly, began to explain the purpose of his visit.

"Isaac, I don't suppose this will come to you as a shock . . . neither do I believe you will be happy to hear it . . . but, Isaac, I am worried about you."

"Worried about me, Joseph?" The young rabbi's face was pale. "I *have* been working hard lately and sometimes I grow impatient at our people's lack of concern about the future of Jewish life here, but, on the whole, I feel well."

"And Theresa, and little Emily, what of them?"

"Thank God, they are well. What is on your mind, Joseph?"

Dr. Lewi spoke plainly. "Isaac, take this business of last night, I admire what you did, but I don't like it. For your sake, I mean."

Rabbi Wise flushed. His eyelids narrowed. "Look, Joseph, I am a rabbi, even as you are a physician. I try to do my duty as you try to do yours. It was my obligation to officiate at the marriage. If the people in Pilsen or Prague don't like it, convey to them my regrets. Tell them to enact just laws or to mind their own business."

"Isaac, you know that what I want to say is for your own good. These are not days of official toleration. Ever since 1815, since before you were born, our situation here has been getting worse. It isn't only the illegal wedding ceremonies . . . although I know of your answer to the Imperial Councillor at Prague. What about the birthday of the Emperor Ferdinand, Isaac? Everyone knows you were supposed to mention his name with praise, indeed, that it was expected you would devote your whole sermon on that Sabbath to recounting the benefits of his rule. We were proud of you, Isaac, when you made merely a passing reference to him during your remarks. But when the Governor of the District summoned you to Pilsen and asked, in legal fashion, 'Is he a loyal citizen?' did you not reply, 'I am not a he.' Why, Isaac? Surely you realize that your little joke at the Governor's expense may prove costly to you."

The rabbi smiled and said, "Perhaps. But he had it coming to him. I am tired of being treated as an inferior by the Emperor's errand boys. Gold braid on the coat is a poor guarantee of nobility in the heart. But, Joseph, I know you mean to speak for my own good. Therefore, let me help you

along. Are you not, as a Jew, also worried about the content of my preaching on strictly Jewish matters?"

"You are a step ahead of me, Isaac. I certainly am concerned about your sermons. Since you attended the meeting of rabbis in Frankfort I have noticed your reform ideas. You want to change old customs. I agree with many of the things you want to accomplish. But for your sake I want to make just one point. You can't fight on all fronts, at once, Isaac, not if you have hope of winning. You are in trouble with the government, with the district rabbi, and with the congregation. I fear for your future."

Rabbi Wise looked thoughtfully at his friend. "You make a strong case," he said. "However, you seem to think of the future entirely in terms of Bohemia, or at most, of the Empire. Dear friend, I am a step ahead of you in my thinking. Look, I am burning with desire to work out new forms for our religion, to make Judaism a source of joy and meaning for our young people. I have no hope for the future of Jewish life in this part of the world. Our condition grows worse and worse. Think of the law controlling Jewish marriages. I am tired of struggling to convince our neighbors that Jews are human beings.

"Here on my desk is a book printed in a new part of the world, in America. It is a book written by Richard Henry Lee, one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence. Listen to what he has to say:

The first maxim of a man who loves liberty should be never to grant to Rulers an atom of power that is not most clearly and indis-

pensably necessary for the safety and well being of Society.

"He speaks my mind, Joseph. His words make me a naturalized American in the interior of Bohemia. In a democratic republic like the United States it should be possible to live as a free man and at the same time to preach and teach our ancient faith in new forms. There are already fifteen thousand Jews in America. It is my intention to leave the Old World and to join them there."

Dr. Lewi rose from his chair, walked over to the rabbi, and grasped his hand. "Isaac, I have been a step behind you. If you persist in your plan, may God speed your journey. Someday we shall join you in America."

The next day Rabbi Wise was absent from the school-room. He traveled by coach to Pilsen to apply for a passport to cross the frontier as the first stage on the journey to the United States. He was denied the passport.

"Do you think we opened schools for you to take your learning to America?" asked the official.

One warm May night in the spring of 1846 an ox cart creaked along a back road that crossed through a woodland from Bohemia into Saxony. Its driver walked before the oxen in the pale starlight, tapping the noses of the beasts as they swayed along in front of the cart which was piled very high with straw.

The great mound of stuff tilted perilously as the rutted track caught at the wheels, but the peasant who drove it was familiar with the road, and the load remained intact. As they emerged from the forest all was quiet. Only an owl's cry and the creaking of the wheels sounded in the stillness.

Suddenly a shadow slid from the edge of the road and confronted the peasant.

"Who goes there?" a voice rang out.

"Just Karl Smolar," the peasant replied. "You know well enough I have to move my straw to the new barn since I was driven off the land where the Emperor is building his shooting lodge."

"Never mind that," replied the border guard. "We have word that the rabbi from Radnitz would escape to America. He has no passport. But go on, you old goat, the rabbi would never be seen in the company of such as you."

The peasant lit his pipe from the lantern in the guard's up-held hand, bade him good-night, and creaked down the road as the oxen slowly lumbered along.

The moon came over the trees when the peasant stopped before a farmhouse a mile farther along. The gleaming, pale pile of straw on the cart began to heave and slide off, and the shadowy figures of a man and woman emerged from beneath the straw. In the woman's arms was a baby. Little Emily had a pink scarf over her face to protect her from hay-seeds and to muffle her cry if she had waked, but the innocence of the very young had carried her dreaming through a major peril in her life.

"Smell the air!" Isaac said to Theresa. "It is already freer."



2. SIXTY-THREE DAYS AT SEA

THE "MARIE" MADE HEADWAY OUT OF THE NORTH SEA. A MODERATE but steady northeast wind filled the sails. Her three masts towered up towards slate-blue sky and grey clouds. The clean sea breeze swept the upper deck where Rabbi Wise sat, his back propped against the rail, left arm and shoulder wedged against a bulkhead to compensate for the pitch and roll of the ship. As the "Marie" drove forward with a seeming life of her own, the bowsprit dipped into the sea, emerging each time to scatter brilliant beads of foam in the air. Across the deck, behind the mizzenmast, the helmsman stood, bare feet planted on the wheel-grating. The great wood and brass wheel turned from side to side as the helmsman passed a few spokes through his hands to port, then

to starboard, taking advantage of wind, holding the ship to her westward course.

"If it took eight days to come to the mouth of the Weser," mused the rabbi, "how can it be possible that we may reach New York two weeks from now, as the captain said we might? Perhaps, if we have all favorable winds. But what of days of calm, when no wind blows? And storms which blow ships far off their courses? It is still the month of May, and a very pleasant spring thus far, but we can hardly count on summer weather. Just as well. There is plenty to do, even on board ship."

Leaving the fine weather and the smell of salt and tar, Rabbi Wise got up and made his way aft. He walked carefully, at each step thrusting his feet well apart to accommodate himself to the roll of the ship. "How do those sailors manage it," he thought, "waltzing around on a slippery deck as if they were on a boulevard in Vienna?"

Rabbi Wise was a man of medium height, sturdy, but not athletic. His years of sitting in study halls had not given him opportunity to develop sea legs. Still, he made good progress, swung down the companion which led to the cabins below, and after a short walk along a very narrow corridor, opened the door of the cabin belonging, in part, to the Wise family.

Originally built to sleep two, there were now four bunks in the narrow little room, two on each side, one on top of the other. A curtain suspended from a wire near the ceiling was drawn at night to give the two families who shared the cabin a little privacy. There were actually five people living in this tiny space. Little Emily sprawled on all fours on one of the lower bunks while her mother kneeled on the floor,

pretending to be some kind of animal as she lunged back and forth, delighted to see her daughter try to raise her head and shoulders from the bed by pushing up by her little arms. Jacob and Rosa Albrecht, their neighbors, were not in the cabin or there would have been no room for such play.

"Isaac," Theresa cried out in surprise, "I thought you were up on deck." She sat on the edge of the bunk and straightened her skirt; a blush touched her cheek. "Really, Isaac, you must think I'm simple-minded, but did you see? Emily can lift her head high off the bed. Isn't it wonderful?"

The rabbi looked gravely at his wife and child. Fingering his gold watch chain and speaking in his best pulpit voice, he said, "It is indeed wonderful. Three months and one week old, on her first sea voyage, and she is already an acrobat. And you, Madame," bowing to his wife, "you are also wonderful. I especially like it when your hair is mussed up and you are having such a good time that you forget to be like the very proper ladies of our former congregation in Radnitz."

Carefully arranging the stray black tresses, Theresa smiled at her husband. "Emily and I both thank you, my lord. Now tell me, what have you been up to? Better yet, sit down and tell me what our life will be like in America."

"As you know, all my travels so far have been in central Europe. Whatever I tell you about America comes from the books I've read and from my imagination. I suppose," he paused and smiled as Emily once more tried to raise her shoulders from the bunk to pay better attention, "I suppose that in some ways life will be hard in the New World. The cities must be small and we shall probably miss some

of the comforts of home. There is a great wilderness beyond the frontier and many Indians. Remarkable people, these Indians, as described by the American author, J. Fenimore Cooper. Still, they are probably not the most reliable of neighbors as yet.

"Another thing, Theresa, we shall be very poor at first. It is a good thing that I have some letters of introduction to people in America and that your brother, Edward, is there. Our passage on the ship took all I had left and we shall arrive in New York with only a few dollars."

"But you knew all that, Isaac, and we had a chance to go to France, instead. Would it not have been simpler to have gone there?"

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully, "it would have been simpler and yet, perhaps, it would not have been simpler. I have the American fever. The great thing about our future life is that we shall be free to live as Jews in the New World. America is a federal republic. This means that public officials are elected by the people. The state is the servant of the citizens; not their master. Each state in the American union has rights which the national government may not take away. And, what is even more important, each citizen has personal rights guaranteed to him by the amendments to the American Constitution, fought for by men like Richard Henry Lee, about whom I have told you before. In America we shall be Jews by right because that is our religious conviction. Jewish residence will not depend on the fact that some ruler decides it will pay him to tolerate us."

Theresa looked admiringly at her husband. "I must confess, Isaac, that I am sometimes afraid when I think about

the unknown future which awaits us in the New World. But when you tell me how it will be I take courage and no longer fear."

"Come, Theresa, let's go on deck before dinner. The fresh air will do you good." The rabbi picked up Emily and carried her in his arms as he and Theresa climbed up the companion-way to the deck.

A few days later the favorable wind slackened, grew less and less, finally died out altogether. The great sails dangled uselessly. There was little motion as the "Marie" sat quietly on a calm sea. Cramped quarters, uncomfortable bunks, and poor food began to affect the passengers. Rabbi Wise paced the deck, visited with the Albrechts, read for a spell, then tossed his book aside to begin once more the short turn on the deck. "Two weeks, indeed," thought the rabbi, "we'll be very fortunate if we reach New York in two months at this rate. Onions and herring and poor tobacco. I am evidently not suited for life at sea."

He knocked out his pipe on the rail and watched the particles of ash and carbon float straight down to the green surface of the water. "Not enough wind to blow a pinch of ash about, much less move a ship of eight hundred tons displacement. Let me see. We left the harbor of Bremen on May 20. It is now June 10 and we have barely begun the crossing of the Atlantic. Well, I hope we shall at least be in New York before Rosh Ha-shono in September."

Captain Frei, a bearded man whose hands and brow were burned a deep bronze by years of exposure to sun and salt air, came along the deck and interrupted the rabbi. "Dr. Wise," said he, "I want to consult you about a problem."

"I'm not a doctor. My title is 'Rabbi,' which means religious teacher."

"I know that, Rabbi. But I have heard that Jewish pastors are men of learning. It is, indeed, a doctor that we need, a doctor of medicine. But there is none aboard and several passengers in the steerage are ill. I don't like the look of it, and I don't know what to do. Even if you are not a proper doctor, it occurred to me that as a man of learning you might be able to help out. I should add that it may be dangerous. God knows what the poor devils have come down with, and whether or not it is catching."

"Take me forward, Captain. I'll see what I can do."

They went along the deck to a companionway that led down to the pantries and galleys, then along a narrow aisle forward towards the bow of the ship. Near the galley end the air was heavy with stale cooking and food already stored too long. As they made their way beyond towards the quarters of the crew and steerage passengers, the stench of unwashed flesh and slop buckets became heavy. The rabbi's stomach turned as he followed the captain down a ladder into the hold of the ship and found himself in the steerage.

Here in a space about twenty feet long by ten in width, under a ceiling so low that a man of medium height could barely stand upright, forty people were crowded on bunks set end to end in tiers of four. A narrow space separated the two rows of bunks, where men, women, and several children slept, ate, performed their bodily needs, and passed the time of day without space, privacy, or fresh air.

The rabbi turned angrily on the captain. "Is this what you call providing living quarters for human beings on a voyage

that takes weeks or months to complete? This hold isn't fit to house cattle, much less men."

"Don't blame me," the captain replied. "The owners and immigration agents are together on this deal to make money. When the governments concerned, including the Senate of your much praised United States, take action, these conditions can be remedied. Meanwhile, what do you say to this?" He led the rabbi to a bunk in the lowest tier.

There lay a man who stopped groaning for a moment as he looked at his visitors with unnaturally bright eyes. "May Jesus help me," the man muttered. "I am so sick." The rabbi spoke to the suffering man.

"When did your skin begin to break out?"

"It was three or four days ago, Doctor. Now I am covered with these boils. I am hot all the time and cannot keep my food down. Is there any hope for me? Will I live to see America?"

"Of course there is hope." The rabbi placed his hand gently on the patient's forehead. "I am not a doctor but I know something about medicine and I shall try to help you. We must first of all pray for God's help. I am a rabbi, a minister of Jewish religion. I know, I know you are a Christian. Nonetheless, let us unite in prayer to the one God whom we address in different ways."

The rabbi arose. "All of you, sick or well, please join with me in prayer."

The moaning of the sick and the subdued talking of those still well gradually died away as Rabbi Wise prayed with bowed head, "Master of the universe, we pray to Thee from the hold of this ship where Thy children lie sick, in pain and

suffering. We ask that Thy presence may be with us. Bring us safely into port. Grant that we may live to enter the promised land of America. Give us strength and courage to meet whatever Thou dost send to us, secure in the knowledge of Thy loving care for Thy children. Heal us and we shall be healed; save us and we shall be saved; for Thou art our hope. Praised be Thou, O Lord, who healest the sick. Amen."

The captain and the passengers joined in saying, "Amen."

"Very well," said the rabbi, "now let us do what can be done. To begin with we must separate those who are sick from those who are well. Captain," he spoke quietly to the master of the ship, "I'm not sure, but I'm afraid it may be smallpox."

The rabbi went quickly from one person to another. He felt foreheads, examined skin textures, asked a few questions of each one. He ordered that a screen be placed between two tiers of bunks and the rest of the hold. This left eight beds for those who appeared to be infected.

The next need was for fresh air. "Captain, didn't I see port-holes high up along the corridor just above this part of the ship? Good. Since we are in such calm waters, please have them opened."

When the port-holes were opened cool air seeped slowly down into the steerage. The rabbi caught hold of two young men. "Each of you take an old shirt and fan the air."

One man at the head of the stairs and the other at the far end of the room started waving shirts. "Aha! Smell that? Fresh air! Enlist all who can help. Change the shift every half-hour."

Rabbi Wise stood in the center of the narrow aisle between the bunks. "Our next need is for another simple thing, very cheap on shore, but rationed here. I want the supply of drinking water doubled. Since there is only a limited amount of water on the ship and we don't know how long it will take to reach land, I shall ask the passengers in the cabins to reduce their ration so that more will be available for you down here. I also want cool, wet compresses on the foreheads of those who are sick."

"A fine idea, Rabbi," said the young man who was waving his shirt rhythmically at the far end of the room, "and we want to thank you for helping us."

The rabbi's dark eyes twinkled. "I know that puns are supposed to be the lowest form of wit, but believe me, we are all in the same boat here. Be of good courage. I shall come down to visit all of you each day. Perhaps the captain will show me what medicines he has on board, and I shall find something that will be helpful to those who are stricken. Good-bye now, and God bless you."

As the rabbi started up the steps followed by the captain, voices sounded from below, voices that seemed to express a new hope: "*Auf wiedersehen*, good-bye."

On June 15 the calm was broken. The wind began blowing strongly from the southwest. Sailors lowered the mainsails and tightened down everything on deck as the wind assumed greater power and dark clouds formed low on the horizon that afternoon. By nightfall the storm was in full progress. Groaning and creaking, the "Marie" was driven before the wind as if she were a toy canoe. Walls of water welled up before her. Up, up the ship climbed, over the summit of the

great waves, only to plunge down into the slough, dipping into the sea. The decks were drenched as the waves broke over them. The heavens opened and torrents beat upon the ship, slackening off from time to time, only to increase with fearful flashes of lightning and rumbling of thunder.

In the cabins everything was in turmoil. Boxes and bags, trunks, eating utensils, everything that was not nailed down was thrown together by the violent pitching and rolling of the ship. The tidy cabin occupied by the Wise and Albrecht families looked like the room of a child who pulls everything out and never puts things back where they belong. People no longer cared about appearances, as they were all visited by "Mr. Ulrich," which is what Captain Frei called the misery of being seasick. Rabbi Wise and Theresa took turns holding Emily, who howled, part in fright, part in sickness, whenever she awoke from fitful sleep.

The rabbi went to the deck from time to time because he felt better there, stomach less queasy, but he would return in a few moments, water streaming from his coat. He was worried about his wife and child. Besides, it was impossible to remain long where he had to cling for his life to a lanyard or be swept overboard.

For the most part the four adults sat huddled in the cabin, watching over Emily in the faint light cast by the small lantern which swung wildly from its hook near the ceiling.

"Isaac," Theresa whispered, "I wish I were dead. We should have stayed in Radnitz."

"Perhaps you are right. It is much worse than I could have imagined. And yet . . . we must be able to look ahead to clear skies and calm seas. We should hold to the faith that

we shall yet come to America and there build a new home. Let's think about that and try to feel better."

It was not always Rabbi Wise who was the comforter. Sometimes Theresa found strength to cheer her husband. Sometimes Jacob and Rosa Albrecht would tell a joke they had read in a letter from America, or recount a story about life in the old country. Between sieges of seasickness they sought to keep each other's spirits high.

The storm raged for three nights and two days. On June 18 the skies began to lighten and the wind seemed less violent. That night the stars could be seen again, and the next day dawned clear and bright with the wind in the north. The ship resumed a westward course. Things were put in order in the cabins and, one by one, the passengers began to feel well enough to come on deck for a breath of clean sea air. Even food became tolerable again as life on board ship became more normal.

More normal . . . and more boring. The ship had been blown far off her course and a long voyage still lay before them. As the days and weeks passed, Rabbi Wise visited the sick, paced the deck, carried Emily about, chatted with his wife and the others, read more books about America, and became terribly bored with the inactive life.

Two of the steerage passengers died and were buried at sea in a simple ceremony conducted by Captain Frei. When asked to speak a word of prayer, Rabbi Wise said, "The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. To His care we commit the souls of these, our brethren, as we lay their bodies in the bosom of the sea."

The rest of those stricken were on their way to recovery,

and there was little more to do for them except to visit them and speak words of encouragement.

Since there was plenty of time to think, the rabbi's mind went back to the days of his childhood and youth in Bohemia. He recalled vaguely the early days in Steingrub when he had read Talmud with his father, when his mother cared tenderly for him although it was so hard to provide for the needs of seven children on the salary of a poor village schoolmaster. He remembered more clearly the days spent at Durmaul with his grandfather, Dr. Isaiah Wise. Here it was that he decided to become a rabbi. Although he was always sent to bed at ten o'clock, he noticed that his grandfather stayed up much later, reading from books kept in a large, closed chest. These books excited Isaac's curiosity.

One day when his grandfather was busy visiting a patient, Isaac had begun the study of these books. They turned out to be volumes of the Cabala, books of religious teaching about how men may seek to draw closer to God! That was it. It was during those studies, at first secretly, then openly, that he had decided to learn all he could about Judaism so as to become a rabbi, a teacher of Judaism. He smiled when he thought about the affair in Prague, when as a young student in the great city, he had tormented the prospective son-in-law of the rich Moses Fischel in the synagogue until Mr. Fischel had lost his temper and boxed Isaac's ears. The affair had a happy ending since the next day Mr. Fischel apologized to him and invited him to eat his meals at the Fischel home while he was a student in Prague. He recalled the days in Vienna at the University when he sought to learn about world history and science and the literature of Europe.

Likewise, while the ship moved slowly westward, he remembered the day he had been ordained as a rabbi only four years ago, his coming to Radnitz, the thrill when Theresa and he stood beneath the chupo to be married, the birth of sweet Emily four months ago, the troubles in Bohemia, and the start of this trip to America where he hoped to begin a new life.

"I wonder what adventures are before us," thought Isaac Wise, as he sat propped up in his favorite corner on deck, the rail behind him, the bulkhead on his left. He lit his pipe, shielding the flame from the sea breeze.

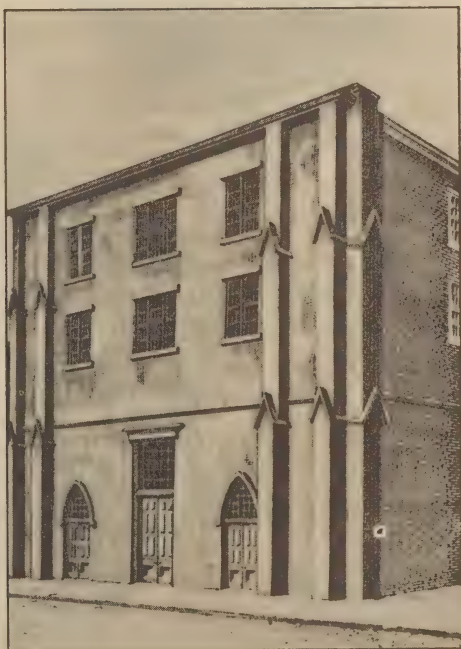
"What will it be like in America?" He always returned to this thought. "Will there be Jews prepared to go ahead and build a kind of Judaism well suited to the atmosphere of American freedom? How can the Jews of that great republic be considered as living in exile when their religious freedom and equal rights as citizens are guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, itself?" Thus Isaac Mayer Wise thought and dreamed, worked and waited, and became very tired of waiting as the good ship "Marie" inched her way towards the New World.

On the night of July 20 the captain told Rabbi Wise that the ship was about fifty miles east of the port of Boston, that if the wind continued favorable, they would soon be in New York. The rabbi told Theresa and he fell asleep that night in a mood of doubt and confusion.

He dreamed that a great storm had arisen which drove the ship towards the land. Everyone swayed, trembled, feared, prayed; the inky waves rose mountain high, and broke into seething masses, only to give way to other watery heights.



Upper: A view of Cincinnati in 1853, about the time Isaac Mayer Wise came to the Queen City.



Right: The Lodge Street Temple in Cincinnati, first home of Congregation B'nai Yeshurun.



Theresa Bloch Wise,
first wife of Rabbi
Wise.



Isaac Mayer Wise as
rabbi of B'nai Yeshu-
run in Cincinnati.

He embraced his wife and child and spoke words of calm and comfort.

It then appeared to him in his dream as though a high, steep, rocky mountain were hurrying towards them and threatened to crush them. "Here we must land or we sink," cried the captain, with quaking voice. Scarcely had these words been uttered when the ribs of the ship, hurled on the rock, cracked. He leaped, and stood on the rock with wife and child. The ocean roared; a wave seized the ship, and cast it far out into the mad waters; in a few moments it was swallowed up in the night, and disappeared.

They were on the rock; at their feet the sea raged; above them and about them were the forbidding cliffs, while darkness added its terror. Finally, morning came. "However steep this mountain appears, we must ascend it," said he to his wife. He took his child on one arm; trembling, his wife clung to the other, and then forward, in God's name! It seemed to him as though an inner voice called, "Up above there is help." With difficulty they clambered from rock to rock, higher and higher, constantly, untiringly. Then, as though the measure of grief were not yet full, hollow-eyed, ghostly, grinning dwarfs, ragged goblins, and tiny poodles, with large, hollow, puffed-out heads, came towards them on the narrow path, blocked their further progress, and mocked him mercilessly. He brushed them aside; but for every ten that he pushed away a hundred arose from the bare rock. They came in the shape of night-owls, and deafened him with their cries; they sizzed about him like angry wasps, and stung him; they placed themselves in his path; they did everything to harass him and prevent his

further progress. His wife at his side wept bitterly, the child in his arms cried for fright, but his courage, strength, and confidence grew. He begged, implored, avoided, circumvented them, all to no avail. Then he marched straight through the crowd of dwarfs, paid no attention to their ravings, dashed them aside to the right and the left, until finally, weary and perspiring, they reached the summit of the mountain. There he saw the most beautiful and glorious landscape, the richest, most fertile meadows, but he sank fainting.

That was the dream.

The truth is that on July 23, 1846, Isaac Mayer Wise and his family walked across the gangplank to set foot on American soil at New York after sixty-three days at sea. They were met by Theresa's younger brother, Edward Bloch, a youth of sixteen, and his employer, John Lindheim.



3. THE NEW WORLD AT LAST

THE TRUNK AND HANDBAGS HAD BEEN DEPOSITED ON THE WHARF. While Theresa was busily engaged telling Edward the latest news from home, Rabbi Wise looked about for some way of moving the baggage to Essex Street. At the other end of the wharf a group of tough-looking drivers waited with horses and carts. They wore tight pants, torn sweaters, and dirty cloth caps pulled low on their foreheads. They called out, some in German, some in English, "Take your baggage to the city! Express! Baggage to the city!"

Turning to one of the drivers who spoke German, the rabbi asked, "How much will it cost to move our trunk and two handbags?"

"Very cheap," came the answer, "only six dollars."

"Six dollars! Just to move our baggage! That is more money than I have."

Further down the line of drivers the rabbi noticed a lone cabby.

"And how much would you want to take our baggage?"

"Sure an' two dollars ought to be about roight."

"Two dollars it will be," answered the rabbi.

Meanwhile, other passengers came up to Rabbi Wise, all of them intent on finding some way of getting their possessions moved from the wharf. He took Jacob Albrecht by the arm.

"Let me help you. Since I can make out in English I'll find you a drayman who will take your things for one-third of what the German drivers ask. It is foolish to spend all your money, since two dollars is surely enough. These men want to take advantage of people who can speak only German."

Without difficulty he found another driver who was eager to earn the smaller fee for his services.

As the bags were put in the carts and the horses started up the incline towards the street, the first driver began to shout at Rabbi Wise, "Now this confounded Jew has to know English, and take the morsel of bread out of our mouths."

A group of the toughest-looking among the draymen circled about the rabbi swearing at him and shouting insults about the Jews. "Death to the Jews! Why don't you Jew thieves stay where you belong? Down with the Jews!"

Shepherding Theresa and the baby along with Edward and Mr. Lindheim before him, Rabbi Wise walked steadily

up the wharf. He cut a dignified figure in his black suit and spotless shirt with a thickly knotted white cravat. He did not answer the insults and belligerent gestures of the draymen. But his heart was sad and his mind filled with black thoughts as he realized that his first encounter in the New World was with the same kind of hatred with which he had become so familiar in Europe.

"What did I do?" he asked himself. "I saved myself and some of the passengers from being cheated by water-front bullies. The result? My people become scapegoats for the anger of the mob."

The black mood was soon dissipated, however, as Rabbi Wise walked about New York in an effort to regain his land legs and to get his bearings in the new environment. After a few days the Wise family found rooms on Broome Street where they made their first home in the United States.

As he walked about the streets of the city, the rabbi was impressed by the rush of the people and the never-ending, strange-sounding noises that assailed his ears. How different it was from the quiet air of Radnitz or the peaceful by-ways of his native Steingrub. New York was an overgrown village, with just the slightest hint of future greatness in the houses on Broadway up to Canal Street and in the business section to the east. Everyone was in a hurry and everyone was very noisy about it. Hundreds of cabs, wagons, and carts rumbled by. Fishmongers, milkmen, ragpickers, newsboys, and popcorn men cried their wares. Even this shouting was sometimes drowned in the rumble of wagons and the cries of the street urchins. On one corner a wandering band thundered Turkish music, as far off-key as the street

sounds themselves. On another a Negro fiddled furiously while he called the figures of the quadrille in a hoarse voice. Everyone rushed frantically on some errand of commerce. Here was a whole world engaged in buying and selling, in building a city and a nation.

"Where are the great buildings?" wondered Rabbi Wise. "Where are the gems of architecture, the theaters, music halls, centers of art, schools of higher learning, such as we have in Europe? Perhaps it is too soon to expect all that to have developed here. New York seems like some lost outpost by the sea. I wonder what the inland cities are like."

Before he was to learn about the interior of the country, the rabbi was introduced to another world, a world that lived below the ground.

One evening, his friend, Joseph Cohen, who had also come from Radnitz in Bohemia, suggested that they go down to the basement of his home. There in a dingy, dimly-lit room Rabbi Wise met a group of young men from Germany. In Europe they had gone through high school, but here in America they had become unskilled workers in factories, cigar makers, and peddlers.

The rabbi sat down with them by a table in their cellar room. They opened their hearts to him and spoke of the hardships of life in the New World. One young man from Bavaria was bitter.

He said, "Here I am free from royal taxes and every man's equal. That is true. But what a miserable life I lead as a peddler. I have left my home, friends, parents, and I neglect my religion to sell my wares in the wild places of America, in isolated farmhouses and tiny hamlets. Let me

tell you, Rabbi, it may have seemed glamorous while I was in Europe, but now that I am here I know what it means to carry heavy loads in the summer's heat and to fall ill in some God-forsaken place during the icy cold of winter. I often wish I had never left home."

"Yes," another lad chimed in, "and there is little hope for the future. We have no time to go to school and we do not even know the English language. That is to say, we know enough to barter our wares, to sell needles and buttons and cloth, but we shall never really learn the language unless we have opportunity to study. Better jobs, like those in stores, require a knowledge of English."

The first boy spoke up again. "How about you, Rabbi? You seem to know this strange language. Won't you teach us? We could pay you, not much, but something."

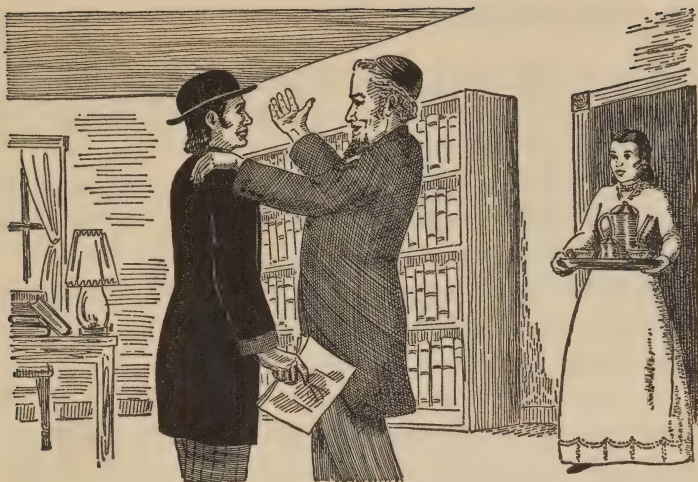
The rabbi stroked his closely-trimmed beard. "I don't know. I don't fancy myself as a teacher of English. Besides, how could I teach you while you are out tramping around the country with packs on your backs? Do you expect me to follow you around?"

"Please, Rabbi. We are not that silly. Sometimes we are here for a week, sometimes even for a month while we wait for merchandise. There are always some of us here, especially at night. How about starting a night school? 'The Wise Academy for the Advancement of English.' You could call it that, or whatever you like. The idea is for us to learn how to say more than, 'You fant to puy somdink? Can I shtay mit you all nacht?' What do you say?"

A smile lit up the rabbi's dark eyes. "Very well. Let's try it. I am unemployed. Here is a New York newspaper. I am

going to read a paragraph out loud. You will then read it, each one, after me, and we shall write down the words that are new. . . .”

In this way Rabbi Wise becomes a teacher of English, his first job in the United States, but he stayed at this work for only two weeks.



4. TO BE OR NOT TO BE A RABBI

ISAAC MAYER WISE HAD COME TO AMERICA AS AN ORDAINED rabbi, a man committed to the service of God and the teaching of Judaism as his life work. He brought with him several letters of introduction from prominent people in Europe to friends in the New World. Two of these were addressed to physicians in New York.

It was a hot summer day when Rabbi Wise found the door with a brass plate bearing the legend: "Eugen Macht, M.D. Please ring." He pulled the knob of the door-bell, heard a sound within and waited on the step.

A short, bald man, wearing a black frock coat, opened the door. He looked at Rabbi Wise with cold blue eyes above narrow rimless spectacles set low on his nose. "If you are

looking for the doctor, come in," he said, his small, pointed grey goatee twitching with curiosity as he sized up his visitor as a potential patient.

"Yes, I am looking for Dr. Macht," the rabbi said as he entered a corridor and followed through an inner door that opened on a small consultation room.

"I am the doctor. Sit down over there." The little man sat behind a carved wood desk. "Now, what seems to be the matter with you?"

"Nothing," Rabbi Wise replied. "I believe I am in excellent health. But let me introduce myself. I am Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and I have come recently from Bohemia to the United States. I want to consult you, but not professionally."

The doctor began to tap the desk with impatient fingers. "If you do not seek medical treatment, why do you come to see me?"

Reaching for the envelope in his coat pocket Rabbi Wise explained, "I have here a letter of introduction from a mutual friend in Bohemia. Please read it."

He passed the letter to the doctor, who raised his glasses to the bridge of his nose and read quickly.

"Aha. Now I see. So you are a newcomer, you come highly recommended and you want advice about getting settled in the New World."

"Yes," Rabbi Wise agreed, "but I want a special kind of advice. Since you are a Jewish person of education and position here I have come to ask your opinion as to how I should get started in my work in America. What is the status of Jewish life here? My dream is to work as rabbi in the New World but I do not know how to start."

"In that case my advice to you is very specific and brief. Don't start at all. Jewish religion in America means nothing. People of culture have nothing to do with the synagogue. If you want to amount to something here you must forget about old-fashioned ideas like Judaism and study to become a lawyer or physician, or find a job and go into business. That is really all I have to tell you. You should have gone to France or stayed in Radnitz if you wanted to be a rabbi. Since I am a very busy man I know you will excuse me now."

The doctor ushered the rabbi out and left him staring at the brass plate. "Not a very friendly fellow," he thought as he started slowly down the street, "but then, perhaps the others will receive me with greater courtesy."

It turned out much the same wherever he went. People urged him to give up the idea of being a rabbi since, they told him, most of the Jews were ignorant, and those few who were people of learning and culture were not interested in religion. They advised him to become a peddler, or to learn a trade or some other profession, but under no circumstances, they said, should he be so foolish as to persist in wanting to be a rabbi in the United States. The result of these interviews was so depressing, that for hours Rabbi Wise wandered around the streets, gaping and staring at strangers in an effort to wipe the memory from his mind.

Determined to find out how matters stood, the rabbi began a round of visits to the seven Jewish congregations which then existed in New York. He went with his landlord, Friedman, to the oldest of these congregations, one that had been founded by Jews originally from Spain and

Portugal. The service was orderly and dignified, but it went on for several hours, the same prayers were repeated over and over, and there were some things said in the order of the prayers which Rabbi Wise could not say in good conscience. After all, if you do not expect or want a restoration of ancient sacrifices in a temple in Jerusalem, why should you pray for it? Should not your prayers be for things which you sincerely believe to be good for you and for other people?

With these thoughts in mind, Rabbi Wise visited an English-Polish synagogue on Elm Street. Longing for the sight of a Hebrew book, the rabbi asked the *shamos*, or sexton, for a copy of the book of Jewish laws called the Mishnah. The shamos laughed mockingly, and the visitor began to sense the ignorance of Judaism which was wide-spread in the New World.

Still hopeful, Rabbi Wise went the next evening to a Polish synagogue. During the intermission between the afternoon and evening services it was customary for the leader of the congregation to read from Rashi, the great eleventh-century French commentator on the Bible. Eagerly, Rabbi Wise joined the group of fifteen men who gathered around a long table in a small side room in the synagogue. At the head sat the leader, a black silk skullcap far back on his head. He stroked his grizzled beard and bent low over the text as he tried to read a few lines.

"He can't read the Rashi script correctly," thought Rabbi Wise as he suffered through the poor reading. Then came the explanation of what Rashi meant, delivered by the leader in a voluble Yiddish. "He is fluent in Yiddish," thought the

rabbi, "but he does not know what Rashi meant by that comment."

The others took the instructions seriously, however. Green-horns, peddlers, push cart vendors, they seemed to find in this attempt at learning something that was missing in the harsh struggle of their work-a-day lives. The lights in the humble synagogue burned low as one old man put a pinch of snuff in each nostril without losing a word of what the leader was trying to explain. Good manners required that Rabbi Wise sit quietly and resist the temptation to interrupt while the reader struggled along with a text of which he was obviously ignorant.

There were four German-speaking congregations, of which three were entirely Orthodox, not given to any attempts to change the rigid customs and beliefs of the past. Rabbi Wise visited the one on Henry Street.

There was a large congregation on the morning of the Sabbath. The service was very long and the people became disorderly as they talked among themselves. The cantor who led the musical part of the service wore a gown like a Christian clergyman and trilled like a nightingale. When it was time to read from the Torah, or scroll of the law, the reader droned on and on in a sing-song voice and the cantor invoked the same lengthy blessing over each man who was called up to the reading because he had made a contribution towards the synagogue.

"Why is this nuisance tolerated in a great city?" Rabbi Wise asked his neighbor.

Finally, Dr. Max Lilienthal, rabbi of three of the German-speaking congregations, came forward to speak. He preached

with force and dignity, although what he had to say about the season of mourning for the destruction of the ancient Temple did not have much meaning for Rabbi Wise. He left the synagogue that Sabbath morning filled with mournful feelings, not about the destruction of Jerusalem, but about the disappearance of a vital expression of Judaism from the modern world.

His last in the round of visits was paid to the youngest of the congregations, Temple Emanu-El. Here the men and women had to sit in separate sections as in the other synagogues; the singing of the choir was poor, but the congregation was quiet and conducted its worship in a reverent manner. The rabbi, Dr. Merzbacher, preached about the end of the *Golus*, the Exile, and made reference to the new light of the modern world, a light that was dawning for the household of Israel as well as for the members of other groups.

Rabbi Wise returned home filled with dark thoughts as to the present situation of Judaism in the United States, yet with hope for the future.

"Theresa," he said, "outside of the Rabbis Lilienthal and Merzbacher, there is not one leader of Jewish life in this whole city who can read Hebrew without the vowel points. With the exception of a few individuals, there is no one who knows anything about Judaism, its history and literature. Ignorance rules everywhere, and along with ignorance, a stubborn refusal to move forward to meet the needs of the times."

"Then what are we to do, Isaac? You know that many people resented your desire for change even in Bohemia, where they were not ignorant of Judaism. How will you

succeed here, where there are so few who care about our religion?"

"Theresa," he replied with a frown, "don't give up so quickly. As far as my personal prospects are concerned, you know that I have already been offered a promising academic post at a university. The only trouble there," he looked at her with a half-smile, "I haven't told you this, but . . . I suspect that a few drops of holy water would assure me of more rapid academic advancement."

"Isaac! Then it's no different here than in the old country. Plenty of Jews become professors and officials of the state after they denied their faith."

"No different. And yet . . . it *is* different. In this country you breathe the air of freedom. Surely, there must be Jews here, young people probably, who understand the value of our historic faith and the lofty ethical code of Judaism. Surely, some of them must understand that for these ideas to survive in the lives of their children, as well as in our contribution to mankind as a whole, our methods of religious practice must be changed. I must find these people and continue my task as a rabbi. Be patient, Theresa. Tomorrow I shall call on Dr. Lilienthal, one of the rabbis I have mentioned. Perhaps he will help me get started."

In the morning Rabbi Wise stopped at a small house on Eldridge Street and rang the bell. A man in a dressing gown with a black velvet cap on his head opened the door.

"I would like to speak to Dr. Lilienthal."

"I am he; step in."

They stepped into the rear room, which was the library.

"I come from Bohemia. Here is a letter from a school friend of yours and here are some of my papers."

Dr. Lilienthal read the letter and the first of twelve documents he had been given. Then he went to the door and called, "Wife, bring coffee and cigars. I have received a guest."

Returning, he extended his hand to Rabbi Wise. "*Sholom aleichem*, peace be with you."

The young rabbi told him of his journey, his impressions of New York, his desire to continue as a rabbi, and his serious doubts as to the future of Judaism in America.

"Hold up your head!" Dr. Lilienthal said, "Courage! You are the man. We need you."

Pepi Lilienthal came into the study with the coffee and cigars on a tray. She was a beautiful and charming woman. A long conversation followed. The promise was made to bring Theresa the next night so that the new couple might meet people whom they would enjoy knowing. Rabbi Wise was strengthened in his hope for the future.

One day Dr. Lilienthal called him to his house and asked, "Are you a good preacher?"

"At home they considered me a passable pulpit orator," Rabbi Wise answered.

"Well, then, go on Thursday to New Haven in the state of Connecticut. They have invited me to dedicate a synagogue there. I am much too busy to leave New York. Go and do your best."

Rabbi Wise rushed home to tell Theresa about his first rabbinical assignment in America. He packed, and early on Thursday morning boarded a coastal steamer that plied between New York and New Haven. He was met at the dock by Leopold Wasserman, who told him how a group of young people who wanted a progressive expression of Judaism

had formed a new congregation, known as Mishkan Israel, the dwelling place, or spiritual home, of Israel.

The hall was on the second floor of a business building near the corner of Chapel and State Streets. On the morning of the Sabbath the rabbi preached a sermon of dedication. Deeply moved by this opportunity of speaking for the first time in his adopted country, Rabbi Wise did so well that after services he was invited to preach the same afternoon for the older congregation in New Haven as well. There he met a peddler who was a member of the congregation in the capital city of New York State, in Albany. The visitor was so impressed by Rabbi Wise that he urged him to come to Albany.

On Sunday evening Leopold Wasserman praised Rabbi Wise, thanked him in the name of the congregation, and presented him with a fee of sixty dollars. This was a large sum of money and the first that he had earned in the New World apart from the tuition received as tutor to the few private students in English.

Bursting with good news the rabbi rushed home to tell Theresa, "Think of it, my dear, I had to speak before both congregations, and they paid me!"

Theresa responded with a peal of merry laughter. "Isaac! Anyone would think it was the first time you had been praised as a speaker. And the money . . . how long do you think we can live on sixty dollars? But there will be other occasions. Of course you will succeed."

In the next issue of the monthly magazine, *The Occident*, Rabbi Wise was surprised to read this notice: "There has arrived from Germany a young schoolmaster who also preaches, and is said to possess some Hebrew learning."

Dr. Lilienthal teased him about it, but it was not long before he had another assignment. The congregation in Syracuse was about to dedicate a new synagogue. "They wished me to come; but I have written them that I would send you," he said.

Isaac Wise accepted gladly. He was given a letter of introduction to Moses Schloss, the president of the community in Albany, where no preacher of Judaism had visited in years. By leaving a week early he could spend the Sabbath in Albany and then proceed by railway to Syracuse. This would be his first trip into the interior of the country. Rabbi Wise boarded the steamer to go up the Hudson to Albany in a very happy mood, regretting only that he would not see his wife and child for some days.

The scenery from the deck of the river steamer was enchanting. The boat seemed like a floating palace and the broad, tawny Hudson like one of the rivers flowing forth from the garden of Eden. There were the steep cliffs of the Palisades, the wide, green valley near Rhinebeck. Here the New World really seemed to begin. "All hail, thou great and glorious land!" the young rabbi cried out, carried away by a feeling of gratitude that he was part of this new nation and that as a teacher of Judaism he was beginning to find his place in it.

The rabbi's flight of fancy was cut short when he noticed a small man walking up and down the deck in a state of anxiety.

"Have you lost anything?" he asked the stranger.

"I have lost everything," he cried out in German, "I have lost my English language."

The man was a Jewish immigrant from Germany who had recently arrived in New York with twenty dollars left after paying for his passage.

"So they said to me, 'Cohen, you must buy a basket for six shillings, and twenty dollars' worth of notions, what we call in German *meshowes*, and then you must go peddling in the country.' I cry out, 'The country speaks English, and I do not. How in the world can I get along?' 'That makes no difference,' they told me. 'We will write everything down for you.' Well, they gave me the basket filled with kuddel muddel, and wrote down for me the English language on a piece of paper, and sent me to Hudson. Now I have lost the English language, and am perfectly helpless."

Rabbi Wise laughed and offered his help. "Get some paper and write down the German words for which you need the English translation." When this was done the rabbi wrote down the English words which had been lost. The peddler now had his English language again, although he still pronounced p for b, f for d, and k for g.

In Albany, Moses Schloss came to Stern's Hotel near the boat landing to meet the new rabbi. All day Friday Rabbi Wise trudged about the streets in Albany. On Saturday morning, accompanied by President Schloss, he went to the wooden synagogue on Herkimer Street. The service was Orthodox, the shamos sold the honor of being called up for the Torah reading to those who promised the largest contributions towards the support of the synagogue, the *chazan* sang the old tunes. Order in the congregation was better than that which usually prevailed in New York. The women were completely separated from the men and required to sit in a

small balcony to the rear. Rabbi Wise delivered his sermon, but, for some reason he was unable to assess, the impression on the people did not seem nearly as great as it had been in New Haven. People were polite after services, but their greeting seemed to lack enthusiasm.

That afternoon Mr. Schloss said to Rabbi Wise, "You preach very well; but you will not do for these people; they did not understand you. Still, we need a rabbi for the Holy Days of Rosh Ha-shono and Yom Kippur, which will soon be upon us. If you care to come back we shall engage you."

Rabbi Wise declined. He was disappointed that he had evidently failed to stir the feelings of the people in Albany. He hoped to spend the Holy Days in Cincinnati, in far-off Ohio, having heard a great deal about that city from a visitor in New York.

On Monday morning the rabbi boarded his first American railway train for the trip across New York State to Syracuse. Instead of compartments running across the width of the car, he was surprised to find a center aisle with seats on both sides. The red plush upholstery of the seats and the large oil lamps attached to the ceiling above the aisle gave the car an elegant appearance. The road bed was rough, but Rabbi Wise was diverted by the splendid train and the sight of the fertile Mohawk Valley. Still, he could not entirely rid himself of worry about his failure in speaking in Albany.

Rabbi Wise took a small copy of the Hebrew Bible from his pocket and sought comfort in its words. An inquisitive Yankee seated next to him asked in what language that book was written. When the rabbi told him, he exclaimed, "Ah, now I know who you are; you are a Jewish bishop." He

explained to the Yankee that the Jews had no bishops, no church authorities at all, that rabbis were simply teachers or pastors for their congregations. But his neighbor drew a New Haven newspaper from his pocket and showed him black on white that a Jewish bishop, named Wess or Wiss, lately arrived from Jerusalem, had dedicated the synagogue in New Haven. He refused to give up his belief that the rabbi was a Jewish bishop and filled him with lemonade, ice cream, and other refreshments at each stop on the railroad.

In Syracuse his fellow passenger took Rabbi Wise to a hotel. The next morning the Syracuse newspaper contained the following notice: "N. traveled yesterday from Albany to this city in company with the Jewish bishop Wess or Wiss (the pronunciation of the name is uncertain), who has lately arrived from Jerusalem."

Almost as soon as he had read the paper at breakfast a stranger approached Rabbi Wise and asked him whether he was the Jewish bishop.

"I am no bishop."

"But you are a rabbi."

Upon having this confirmed, he continued, "We here in America have never seen a rabbi, although we have been told there are several in New York, and the rabbi is certainly also a bishop."

The stranger went on to explain that he too was a Jew, that he had converted himself to Judaism. He told the rabbi that he built a booth as commanded in the Bible in connection with the Sukos festival in the fall of the year, that he tried to keep all Jewish customs, visited the synagogue on

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and believed in only one God, as did all Jews.

A committee from the synagogue arrived and Rabbi Wise learned that the new temple structure was not finished and that the dedication would have to be postponed for a week. He spent the week getting acquainted with the people, trying to find out why his message had not been successfully received in Albany. He soon found that it was not because the people had no thirst for Judaism, no desire for knowledge about their history and faith. The fault, he learned, had been simply his. He had talked above the heads of the people, addressing himself to peddlers, workers, clerks, almost all of whom were recent immigrants, as if they had been graduates of European universities. "Speak as if you were teaching school," he counseled himself, "and you will be able to express the same ideas but in language which the people can understand and appreciate."

The great and joyous occasion of the dedication of the synagogue in Syracuse finally took place on Friday night and Saturday, the week before Rosh Ha-shono, the Jewish religious New Year's day, in 1846. With his new understanding of the people, Rabbi Wise was very successful in impressing them with the meaning of the work they had completed, and the nature of the tasks that lay ahead.

It was now so near to the Holy Days that Rabbi Wise accepted the position in Albany for Rosh Ha-shono and Yom Kippur and left by train right after the dedication in Syracuse. The return trip to Albany was a happy one for Rabbi Wise. As the train clacked along the tracks, he thought, "There are life and energy in this new Judaism, whether it

be conscious or unconscious. The people lack culture; they do not possess a true appreciation of the conditions under which they live. But they form congregations, build synagogues, and feel a longing for the living word. 'Tis well. I have found my vocation and my mission."

Things went very well in Albany over Rosh Ha-shono, so well that on the second day a delegation of the congregation suggested that Rabbi Wise petition the congregation setting forth that he wanted to remain, preach, and open a school. Although gratified by the offer, the rabbi noted that he had not been invited to state that he would come to Albany as a *rabbi*. Knowing that one of the great weaknesses in American Jewish life at the time was that community affairs were more often than not placed in the hands of what were called "reverends," a kind of religious jack-of-all-trades, most of whom were ignorant of both Jewish and general learning, Rabbi Wise wrote a note to the congregation: "If you wish to elect me, you must elect me as rabbi. That is my province. I will preach and open a school. I leave to you the determination of the amount of salary, because I do not know how much is needed here. I will write no petition. I have never sought a position, and will never do so."

In the evening the rabbi returned by steamer to New York to be with his family. The next morning, as he returned to Broome Street from an errand, his landlord, Friedman, greeted him with a broad smile. "I congratulate you. You have been elected unanimously in Albany as rabbi. Your wife has the telegram."

Rabbi Wise spent the week in New York and returned to Albany for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Theresa

packed and brought little Emily to the capital city during the festival of Sukos, or Tabernacles. They moved to a new home at 77 Ferry Street. Rabbi Wise was ready to begin the long and difficult task of spreading the light of Judaism in America.



5. ADVENTURES IN ALBANY

IN 1846 ALBANY, THE CAPITAL OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, was a small town. The houses were small, the streets unpaved. The name of the Jewish congregation was Bethel, meaning House of God. Most of the members were peddlers and small merchants. They lived with their families in two or three rooms, smoked cigars that cost three cents apiece and drank beer at three cents a glass. Rabbi Wise earned two hundred and fifty dollars a year, a very small salary even in those days. To make enough for both ends to meet, the rabbi rented out the top story of his house to another family, used the middle story as a home, and turned the first floor into a school for children.

The school was a success from the start. Most children went to private schools, many of which were sponsored by churches, since the public school system had not yet been established. For each pupil in the school a tuition fee of nine dollars a year was charged. The school opened with seventy-six boys and girls, most of them in the primary grades. Within a few months there were well over one hundred, and the rabbi had two teachers to assist him. The children had received very little schooling before Rabbi Wise came to Albany. They knew little enough about subjects like English, geography, and arithmetic; nothing at all about Judaism and Jewish history. One boy of eight rushed home one day and in great excitement told his father, "That Dutchman of a teacher is a fine sort of fellow! He does not even believe in Jesus Christ!"

The boy's father told the story to Rabbi Wise, who had to explain to his class that the basic belief of Judaism is in one God, and that Jews think of Jesus as a man who was one of the great prophets or teachers of religion.

In spite of the poor preparation of the boys and girls, the school made great progress, and the Wise family found friends among the members of the congregation. The president, Moses Schloss, was a young man of the same age as the rabbi. He understood the ambition of Dr. Wise, to raise the intellectual and spiritual level of the people and to work out a form of Jewish religious expression that would command their respect and that of the entire community. The attempt to make Judaism a vital force in the lives of modern men had been called reform in Europe. Rabbi Wise had attended a meeting of rabbis in Frankfort where these prob-

lems had been discussed. The people in Europe had not made much progress in giving practical expression to the new ideas. Here in Albany Rabbi Wise found friends who were sympathetic to his approach. He introduced the idea of re-forming, of giving new form to the eternal truths of Judaism. Moses Schloss approved of this as did other friends, among them Joseph Sporberg and Abraham Westheimer, but not all were equally convinced.

The question was how to begin making the necessary changes in the synagogue service. Rabbi Wise visited New York and came back with a book of music. It was called *Shir Tziyon*, the "Song of Zion," and it was the work of a famous cantor and composer named Sulzer.

Since he had to start his great plans somewhere, Rabbi Wise began with the choir. A violinist named Topp was engaged and all the members of the congregation who wanted to sing were invited to try out for the choir. Two men with deep voices who could sing bass were found. But among all those who tried out there were no suitable soprano or alto voices. Lest the choir fail to get started, Rabbi Wise immediately began giving music lessons three times a week to the older children in the school. The boys and girls liked the music and soon joined the older singers for rehearsals as a congregational choir.

One Friday night that spring, a few weeks before Pesach, the festival of Passover, the choir sang for the first time at Sabbath eve services. It was a great occasion. The synagogue was packed with men, women, and children. In feverish excitement they waited for the first notes from the choir.

Rabbi Wise went to the reading desk on the pulpit. The

congregation quieted down as he nodded to the violinist. Cantor and choir then began to sing, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." Many mistakes were made. The cooperation of chazan and choir left much to be desired. Some of the children sang off-key. But the general effect of the great Sulzer music was electric. The congregation followed the service in pious enthusiasm. Many were amazed at the effect of sound direction, good music, and instrumental accompaniment. Albany was inspired musically. The reformation within Judaism had begun.

After the service, people gathered about to congratulate the rabbi and the members of the choir. In his vivid imagination Dr. Wise heard organ, orchestra, and brilliant oratorios resound in the synagogue. "Of course," he exclaimed, "German music! Who will not listen enchanted? Sulzer's songs! Who will not worship?"

But a very serious problem arose at a meeting of the Board of Trustees of the congregation during the following week. Moses Schloss pointed out that the normal Orthodox service on a Sabbath or Festival morning took four or five hours even when the chazan led the prayers at so fast a pace that no one had time to meditate on their meaning. "Now," he went on, "you must all realize that we have added two most important elements to the order of divine service. Our rabbi preaches a sermon of great value to the people and our choir sings the most important prayers. How shall we find time for all of this along with the entire ritual as it now stands?"

Joseph Sporberg, a plump young man with a face as sad as a hound dog's, arose, "You are quite right, Mr. President. It is a very fine thing to spend the entire day in the House

of God. But the day when we are supposed to do that is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. We are not supposed to do that every Sabbath and every religious holiday. I hope the members of the Board will not think me a great sinner when I say that I believe a Jew should also spend some of his spare time at home with his family. In fact, it was the rabbi himself who told us in one of those sermons which you have just mentioned that a Jew's first responsibility is to his wife and children and the old folks in the home. How shall we fulfil these responsibilities if we are out working all week and then have to *daven* all day on Shabos?"

Sporberg sat down to laughter and applause. The president turned to Rabbi Wise and asked for his opinion. The rabbi said, "I suggest that we eliminate repeating the same prayers over and over. We also have many poems, dirges, and petitions that no longer have any meaning for us. Since the authors of those different liturgical pieces were all alike holy and learned, I do not feel justified in discriminating among them. I therefore recommend that all these liturgical selections be dispensed with."

The suggestion was voted upon and passed. Not everyone agreed, however. At the back of the room Louis Spanier, a dark-haired man with a strong aquiline nose and thin lips, whispered to one of his cronies, "I'm glad they passed it. Let's give him plenty of rope." Dr. Wise was not aware of the opposition and now felt encouraged to go ahead with a project he had already begun: the preparation of a new prayer book to be called *Minhag America*, the Prayer Custom of America.

Because he had fled from Bohemia by night, Rabbi Wise

had been forced to leave his cherished books behind in Radnitz. It was a slow and expensive task to bring together all the books he needed for his teaching and preaching as well as for his never satisfied desire for knowledge. Fortunately, there were two extensive libraries in Albany, the State Library and the library of the Young Men's Association. Dr. Wise spent many hours in these two places. He would come in, light the lamp in one of the book-lined alcoves, and seek out the volume he wanted. He then sat down by a round oak table and read.

It was not long before he became acquainted with several other men who frequented the libraries. A poet named Streeter was librarian of the state institution. He introduced Rabbi Wise to Chief Justice Wood, a man who refused to accept any public office for five years, during which time he read nothing but theological works, so as to prove to priests, as he put it, that they were "deceived deceivers." A fourth devotee of the library was Theophilus Wood, a retired lawyer of considerable wealth, who did nothing except read and talk. Theophilus Wood was interested in poetry and art, while Chief Justice Wood was a man of great reasoning power, inclined to be skeptical and pessimistic.

These three men soon became fast friends of the young rabbi. The group would often spend hours discussing everything from problems of religion and philosophy to current events. They were sometimes joined by Professor Amos Dean, a middle-aged man of scholarly bent, author of an early work on psychology.

One night the four friends were gathered about a table in the State Library. The gas lights cast a cheerful glow as the

men talked on and on, making good-natured jokes about each other's pretensions to the mastery of many subjects. "It is my intention," Rabbi Wise stoutly maintained, "to master the field of Jewish theology." Chief Justice Wood, a tall, lean man with a mop of white hair and a quizzical smile that seldom left his lips, turned to the young rabbi.

"Why don't you read law instead of theology?" he asked. "Whatever may be of the weakness of the law it usually makes sense, which is more than can be said for your benighted specialty."

The others joined Wood in a gale of laughter but Rabbi Wise grew serious. "You remind me of the people I first met in New York," he said. "If we had more enlightened faith in America, we would require fewer laws. I think I shall stay with my subject, the Justice of God rather than the laws of men."

"Well said, Isaac," Streeter put in, "you caught him that time." But Chief Justice Wood continued to look at his young friend with a knowing smile.

The range of the rabbis' friends was thus not limited to the members of his own congregation. The coterie at the library enjoyed each other's company very much. The rabbi realized he still spoke English with many foreign sounds and phrases. Chief Justice Wood and Professor Dean decided to spend two hours a day with Rabbi Wise so as to help him improve his English style. For his part, he gladly answered all of their questions about Judaism. He was the first person of Jewish faith whom they had met and with whom they felt such close kinship of spirit that all of their questions could be voiced and answers received which made

sense even when they disagreed with him. It was the support of such friends, within and outside the congregation, which helped give Dr. Wise the strength to deal with the problems which soon arose in connection with his ministry in Albany.

There were many missionaries abroad in the land. Attached to various churches or to missionary societies, they went about preaching that no one could be saved unless he accepted their particular kind of religious faith. Like people in other kinds of occupations, some of the missionaries were sincere individuals who wanted to save souls. But some of them had become missionaries because they were failures at other kinds of work and found a means of earning a livelihood in the missionary field. Without exception these people taught that the greatest good would come from the conversion of the Jews. In the pursuit of their aim some of them insulted the Jewish religion, of which they were usually ignorant, and from which their own faith had arisen. Among the missionaries none was more hostile to Judaism than a few converted Jews who had turned from their own faith and who were paid to preach to their former brethren.

One of these was a man named Cohn. He pretended to be a rabbi from Jerusalem. Actually he was an ignorant man with a crude ability to repeat a few simple ideas in public in a voice that had the quality of a fog horn. He had deserted the faith of his fathers because he saw in missionary work an opportunity to make a good living easily. Rabbi Wise had heard of him and was glad that he had not favored Albany with a visit.

One day a prominent Christian woman stopped Rabbi Wise on the street.

"Will you speak tonight at the great meeting?" she asked.

"At which meeting, madam?"

"In Dr. Wykoff's church," she replied with a malicious smile, "here is the notice in the *Argus*."

Rabbi Wise read: "The Reverend Rabbi Cohn, from Jerusalem, a missionary of the London Society for the improvement of the condition of the Jews, will speak this evening in Dr. Wykoff's church, with the purpose of forming a branch organization for this holy and humane work. The lower floor will be reserved for the clergy, the church officers, and their ladies. The general public will be accommodated with seats in the gallery."

When he had finished reading, the rabbi said to the lady, "Yes, I shall speak."

"And I shall listen," said she, "and my husband also."

Rabbi Wise hurried home and put on his frock coat. Theresa was surprised, but hastened to help the rabbi put on his stiff collar and white neckerchief. At seven o'clock promptly Rabbi Wise stood at the entrance of the church where the sexton tried to keep him from entering.

"Are you a Protestant clergyman?" he asked.

"I am a clergyman, you know that full well, who protests against all of you; consequently I am a protestant clergyman," the rabbi replied, as he walked past the sexton.

Rabbi Wise seated himself near the pulpit. When the Unitarian and Universalist ministers entered, the three came to an understanding that the two liberal Christians would second whatever Rabbi Wise would propose during the meeting, and that he would do the same with respect to whatever they might propose.

The church was soon entirely filled. Dr. Wykoff entered at eight o'clock in the company of several prominent citizens. A small, dark, well-fed man with little black eyes walked in with them.

Following a prayer and hymn, the meeting was organized with Dr. Wykoff as chairman, who suddenly noticed Dr. Wise seated just in front of the pulpit. He coughed and stammered as he had to explain the purpose of the meeting: to further the conversion of the poor Jews. Pulling himself together, he went on to use the stock conversionist phrases about the darkness in which the Jews lived and the great benefits which would come to them and the world if they could be brought to see the light of the true religion. As he finished he asked, "Does anyone wish to speak on the subject?"

This was the point at which the Reverend Rabbi from Jerusalem was to have been introduced, but instead, Dr. Wise called out in a loud voice, "I ask for the floor, Mr. Chairman."

Without waiting for an answer the rabbi began his address, "From a moral viewpoint, dear friends and neighbors, you know perfectly well that many missionaries are hypocrites who pretend to a piety and concern for the Jews which they do not really feel. The man who has been brought into our midst tonight is even more hypocritical than most missionaries. He is a Jew who preaches Christ. You are people of good sense. You know that if you want to learn about Judaism you are more than welcome in Temple Bethel. If you want to learn about Christianity you will attend your own churches. A Jew who has deserted his faith is a renegade.

When he presumes to piety, it is false piety. When he comes to convert the Jews, he is doubly a hypocrite. Faithless to his own religious tradition, he now asks you to support him while he pretends to meddle in the religious life of his former brethren.

"Just as we will not heed his false witness, neither will we accept the material prizes often dangled before poverty-stricken Jewish adults and children. I have seen them at the piers in New York, these missionaries, trying to lure little children with gifts of candy and toys. But you know very well that we Jews provide for our own poor, our widows, and orphans, that we rear our own children in a family communion which is frequently pointed to as ideal. We do not take up our proportion of rowdies, street walkers, and gamblers. We need no help and accept none."

Applause broke forth from those seated in the gallery. The rabbi continued, "Moreover, if time were allotted I would go on to show why from a theological viewpoint the conversion of the Jews is impossible. Our faith in the one and only God of the universe makes us strong enough to resist all attempts to draw us away from His service. Indeed, I know that many of you feel as I do about these things, that your kind of religion is closer to mine than it is to that of the apostate who has come here tonight to further his own purposes.

"No, my friends, I am in a position to tell you that neither by gold nor cunning, neither by persecution nor force, can the Jews be converted. It would be productive of much greater good if your missionaries devoted their zeal to making true Christians out of many who call themselves by the name of the Christian master."

Turning back towards the pulpit, Rabbi Wise concluded, "Mr. Chairman, I move that the meeting adjourn."

The Unitarian minister arose and seconded the motion.

"All those in favor of the motion will say 'aye.'"

A rousing "aye" thundered from the gallery and the meeting was over.

For many years after, whenever a missionary came to Albany, Dr. Wykoff would first bring him to meet Dr. Wise. There were no more meetings for the purpose of converting the Jews.

Meanwhile, the oppressed people in central Europe, from which the Wise family had escaped, grew more and more impatient under the restrictions imposed on them. People met secretly in Bohemia and the surrounding provinces, making plans to strike a blow for freedom. The leaders hoped to throw off foreign rule and found a democratic form of government.

One day in early spring, 1848, Rabbi Wise burst into the house in a state of great excitement. "Theresa, Theresa," he called out, "where are you?"

"Here I am," she answered, drying her hands on her apron as she came out of the kitchen. "What on earth is the matter with you? Why aren't you in school at this hour?"

"Because I have just received such great news from Europe that I have sent the children home. Theresa, there is a revolution in central Europe! The movement is spreading and democratic governments will be set up, perhaps even in Bohemia. The long night of exile is coming to an end. Begin to pack! We must prepare to go back and join in the struggle for freedom."

"Just one moment, Isaac," Theresa tried to calm him down. "We have just begun to find our place here in America when you propose to drop everything and rush back to Europe because there is a revolution. You had better wait and see how the revolution turns out. I have had enough traveling and I do not want to leave our home and friends. Talk it over with some of your companions at the library. I believe they will agree with me."

Taken aback by Theresa's opposition, Rabbi Wise hurried to the State Library where he found Chief Justice Wood seated in his usual chair in the reading room.

"Have you heard the news about the uprisings in Europe?" the rabbi asked his friend.

"Yes, and knowing what a broad romantic streak you have in your nature, I suppose you are leaving on the next ship," Wood looked at Rabbi Wise with an amused smile. "Take it easy, Isaac. Long before you could get back to Europe the revolt will probably be crushed. All you would accomplish is to dislocate your family and throw your congregation into chaos. But don't take my word for it. Why don't you write to Senator Seward or visit my friend Horace Greeley at the *Tribune* office in New York? I'll wager they will both agree with me."

Rabbi Wise did as his friend advised and soon learned that both the senator and the editor agreed with his wife and his friend. When their predictions came to pass with the brutal suppression of the revolutions and a new era of reaction set in, Rabbi Wise realized that the future hope for a democratic way of life lay primarily in America.

"You were right, Theresa," he said. "It would have been

very foolish for us to have gone back. Our work is here. I must try to learn to be less excitable."

Theresa smiled at him. "I have no fear that you will become dull and complacent. But when you want to dash off as a knight in shining armor, I have to remind you that the task is here in Albany, not in some distant castle."

There was one very good indirect result of the ruthless suppression of the masses in Europe. Many of the most sensitive and advanced among the revolutionary leaders migrated to the United States. Among them was Dr. Joseph Lewi, the old friend of Rabbi Wise from Radnitz.

As soon as he heard of this, Rabbi Wise sent him a message to New York, urging him to come to Albany. When the man who had borne the message returned, he carried this reply, "I am now a poor immigrant and would be a burden to you. Since I am told that all friendship ceases in America, each one must look out for himself."

The rabbi answered, "Dr. Lewi, if you do not come to me at once in Albany, never call me friend again."

Two days later Dr. Lewi and his family made their appearance at 77 Ferry Street and the old friends were reunited. The Lewi's later moved into the third floor of the house, and it was a source of great happiness for Dr. Wise to introduce his old friend to the members of the congregation and to his group at the library.

Events had moved swiftly in Albany during the first two years of the ministry of Dr. Wise in the city. The choir had been introduced, the service changed, the school established, the missionaries confounded. The whole community was aware that a new and eloquent voice was raised in exposition

of the ancient faith of Judaism. But the interests and hopes of Rabbi Wise went far beyond his congregation at home. He wrote in *The Occident*, a magazine edited by the Orthodox leader, Isaac Leeser, in Philadelphia, that all the Jewish congregations in the United States should join together in a kind of union so that religious life could be strengthened, reforms introduced in an orderly way, a new edition of the prayer book prepared. Although considerable interest was aroused, nothing came of these early efforts. Instead, many turned away from Rabbi Wise and became his enemies because they were opposed to his plans for a modern form of Jewish religious expression. Chief among his enemies was Louis Spanier. But deeply concerned about the future of democracy in the United States, the rabbi devoted himself to problems of general significance on the national scene, and did not see the threat of Spanier.

When Isaac Mayer Wise had come to the United States in 1846, a state of tension existed between this country and Mexico. At this point the leaders of the Mexican government broke off relations with the United States, but did not declare war.

If things had stopped at this point, the annexation of Texas could have been settled peacefully, but the weakness and inefficiency of the Mexican leaders was a kind of invitation to extremists in the United States. The Texans claimed all the land to the Rio Grande River, but the Mexicans said that Texas had never extended beyond the Nueces River. Other quarrels followed and Congress carried out President Polk's policy by declaring war on our less powerful neighbor to the south. It did not take long before the superior training

and equipment of the American soldiers enabled them to occupy Monterey, Vera Cruz, and the capital, Mexico City. A treaty was signed which gave the United States almost all of the land south of the Oregon Country as far west as the Pacific Ocean. The United States paid Mexico fifteen million dollars for the territory which Mexico had been unwilling to sell before the war.

Although a recent arrival in the country, Rabbi Wise preached about the Mexican War from his pulpit in Albany. He felt no need to wait until he had detailed knowledge of American policy and problems. The use of superior military power to take away the land and possessions of weaker neighbors was not new to the rabbi from Bohemia.

It was to escape from tyranny and injustice that he had left the Old World, he thundered from the pulpit, as he observed that the leaders of the United States acted like European rulers in taking what they wanted under the pretense of a "manifest destiny" for westward expansion.

He warned all whom he could reach that the country would endanger its democratic Constitution by such adventures and that the spiritual wound inflicted on the nation would never be healed.

Rabbi Wise did not stand alone in this position. A congressional resolution thanking the soldiers carried by only one vote, and stated that the war was "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President of the United States."

Reformer though he was, Rabbi Wise always stressed constructive changes with respect to the practice of Judaism. He did not believe in changing anything just for the novelty

of the change or because the new way might prove more convenient than the old. He had deep respect for Orthodox Jews whenever their practice squared with their belief. He knew that their way of life was not easy to maintain. He believed that observance of the Sabbath, from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday, was a necessary religious act for all devout Jews. Not that he insisted that the day be observed in an Orthodox fashion, only that it be observed as a sacred day devoted to worship and the higher things of life rather than to business, work, and the making of money. Since most of the Jews, including those who called themselves Orthodox, did not really observe the Sabbath, Rabbi Wise went among his people urging them to do so. He succeeded in having the Board of Trustees of Bethel Congregation pass a rule to the effect that officers of the congregation and Board members were required to close their places of business and abstain from work on the Sabbath. Opposition to these moves was not open, but it had begun to smolder beneath the surface. Several merchants went to Louis Spanier to complain. He listened to them with obvious sympathy.

The first act in this struggle came to a climax at Passover in 1848 when a fight broke out in a meeting of the congregation. The opponents of the rabbi objected to the fact that he had recently been elected for a three-year term of office at an increase in salary. Rabbi Wise learned of the struggle as he and Theresa were about to leave for a visit to New York. He hurried to the synagogue, took the contract from his pocket, and tore it up. When the family returned a few days later, everyone claimed to be his friend and the breach was healed, but only for a while.

It seemed as if all the forces of life had joined to turn the happiness of Rabbi Wise to grief. Opposition grew at home and throughout the country. A great fire broke out and reduced half of Albany to ashes. There followed a cholera epidemic which claimed the life of the Wises' second child, an infant daughter named Laura. Sick at heart, the rabbi was possessed by the thought of approaching death. His face grew haggard and there were black circles under his eyes.

By February of 1850, Dr. Lewi became alarmed about the rabbi's listless condition. "You must go south for several weeks," he said. The Board granted a leave of absence and Rabbi Wise set out upon a journey which was the turning point in his career.



6. A TRIP TO THE SOUTH

WHEN RABBI WISE LEFT ALBANY IN FEBRUARY, THE COUNTRY was frozen solid. There were no boats on the Hudson River because of the ice. Since the railroad did not go directly to New York, his first destination, the rabbi spent the first day going by train to Bridgeport, Connecticut. The road-bed was rough and the coach was cold, depending for heat on the wood-burning stove near which he sat as the train bounced along. The countryside was covered with snow. The trees were bare and black, their twisted boughs brittle in the light from the thin wintry sun. Slim columns of blue-grey smoke spiraled from the chimneys of farmhouses along the right of way. The engine whistled mournfully as the train approached towns where the houses seemed huddled to-

gether against the cold. Few people were about. Those whose work took them out of doors, men and horses, steamed as they trudged through the snow.

The rabbi stared through the train window at the grey countryside. He thought, "Not four years ago I traveled up the Hudson with such high hopes. Now I am broken in health and sad at heart. So far the struggle gives little hope of ending in victory for the building of a new form of Judaism in this country. Everywhere I meet the same opposition, the same clinging to old forms without knowledge of the past or understanding of the present. And it is shameful the way opponents attack me as if I were an enemy of our faith instead of being committed to its survival and growth."

These bitter thoughts beset him until his arrival at Bridgeport. There he changed to a steamer for the trip across Long Island Sound to New York. The motion of the boat was much more pleasant than the bouncing of the train. Rabbi Wise ate dinner on the boat, lit a cigar, and went on deck. With his greatcoat buttoned to his throat, he thrust his hands in his pockets for warmth and slowly paced the deck. Below, the water was calm and quiet. Above, the stars cast brilliant light in a clear sky. "It is an odd thing how we are creatures of mood," he thought. "Only a few hours ago everything seemed dark and hopeless. Now I begin to see how small my disappointments are in comparison with the great task of my life. Perhaps I have not lost my true vocation after all. It may be that instead of uniting people, the reformation of Judaism will split them into two groups for a time. Better to divide people with courage for the service of God than to hold them together out of habit merely so as to preserve old forms."

In New York, Rabbi Wise hurried to call on Dr. Max Lilienthal. Here he found little to confirm any optimism. Dr. Morris J. Raphall, a noted Orthodox rabbi from England, had come to New York. He busied himself in attacking Rabbi Lilienthal and in seeking to draw people from the cause of reform. The two friends exchanged their unhappy experiences. It was Rabbi Lilienthal's plan to leave the rabbinate and devote himself to teaching.

Traveling on to Philadelphia, Rabbi Wise visited his Orthodox colleague, Isaac Leeser. Rabbi Leeser also had a tale of woe. The difficulties of the minister of God were not limited to those who advocated progress and change. Rabbi Leeser was working on a translation of the Bible into English for use by Jewish congregations. Rabbi Leeser also told him that Dr. Raphall was about to lecture in Charleston, South Carolina, where he would probably become involved in a debate with the leaders of Congregation Beth Elohim of that city, a group whose members shared many of the ideas of Rabbi Wise about reform.

This news was of the keenest interest to Rabbi Wise. Having heard that the congregation in Charleston wanted to engage a chazan as religious leader, he had written them a letter from Albany. Since his own congregation was now divided between his supporters and those who resisted every reform he had introduced, he had decided to inquire about the position that was vacant in the southern city. Rabbi Wise had not yet heard from Charleston. He confided in Rabbi Leeser that after a visit in Washington, D. C., he might proceed to Charleston. "That is what the doctor ordered," he said, with just a hint of the usual twinkle in his eye, "a trip to the South. It will be good for my health and besides,

I shall see a part of the United States which I have never yet visited. The position at Beth Elohim being open would add interest to the trip, and if your friend Raphall is looking for a debate, then perhaps my presence there at that particular time would not be altogether wasted."

Isaac Leeser looked at Isaac Wise. "I should never have told you. But, if you decide to go, I hope it does you some good. As for Raphall, I know he can take care of himself. You can do me a small favor. Send me his first lecture so that I may publish it in *The Occident*."

"It shall be done, if I go." The two men exchanged a warm handclasp and Rabbi Wise set out for Washington. On his way he thought about the visit with Rabbi Leeser. "It is good to know a man with whom you can disagree on almost every subject but who respects you and who commands your respect."

Once in the nation's capital Rabbi Wise looked up Senator William H. Seward, whom he had known in Albany. Senator Seward greeted the rabbi cordially, introduced him to Daniel Webster, and took him to meet the President of the United States, General Zachary Taylor. They found the President seated in a chair near an open fireplace with his back to the door. In response to their greeting the President said, "Come closer, gentlemen, it is very cold today." After they had become acquainted and had talked for a while, President Taylor asked the rabbi why he had come to see him. The President was amazed to learn that, unlike most of his visitors, Rabbi Wise had not come to ask for anything, but merely for the honor of meeting the great soldier who was the nation's chief executive.

The Senate of the United States was debating the important issue of slavery. Senators from the South sought to extend the areas in which slavery would be legal, while those from the North fought against such extension. Senator Henry Clay had introduced a bill known as the Compromise of 1850, which provided for the admission of California to the Union as a free state and the creation of New Mexico into a Territory without slavery, while the Fugitive Slave Law was to be made more stringent and nothing was to be done to interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia.

The greatest orators in the country debated this bill while the rabbi from Albany sat in the gallery of the Senate for eight days, drinking in each word. He wrote in his diary, "My sojourn in Washington had an Americanizing influence on me. I felt that I was one of the American people although I had not yet been naturalized, and from that time I said 'we,' 'us,' and 'our' quite unconsciously whenever I spoke of American affairs. I felt greatly uplifted and aroused by this intercourse with the great spirits of the country and the kindly reception wherewith I met. The intellectual eight-day combat that I witnessed in the Senate stirred me mightily, enlarged my horizon, refreshed my mind, and taught me what was needed to become an English orator."

While in Washington Rabbi Wise received a cordial invitation from the congregation in Charleston to come and speak. He accepted quickly, then booked passage on a coastal steamer and began the voyage to South Carolina. As the ship moved slowly to the south, the sun became warmer and the sky a brighter blue. The air was soft with the promise of

an early southern spring. All the struggles and bitterness of the past seemed very far away now as Rabbi Wise relaxed in a happy frame of mind on the steamer.

The history of the distinguished congregation called Beth Elohim was already known to him. It was now one hundred years old. Over twenty-five years before, a group of forty-seven members had petitioned the congregation for changes in the ritual. These members had wanted the same changes he had begun in Albany. They had concluded their memorandum to the Board of the congregation in these words: "We wish not to *overthrow*, but to *rebuild*; we wish not to *destroy*, but to *reform* and *revise* the evils complained of; we wish not to *abandon* the institutions of Moses, but to *understand and observe them*; in fine, we wish to worship God, not *as slaves of bigotry and priestcraft*, but as the enlightened descendants of the chosen race, whose blessings have been scattered throughout the land, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

Isaac Mayer Wise thought about this early attempt to reformulate Jewish religious practice in Charleston as the boat neared the harbor of that city. He knew that the petition had been denied and that the group had resigned from the congregation to create a new organization called the Reformed Society of Israelites. The new group had survived only a few years, but its members were not without influence. Since those days, Beth Elohim had made many departures from fixed Orthodox practice. These had been due in part to the leadership of Mr. Gustav Poznanski, the chazan, who now served the congregation in an honorary capacity, without receiving any salary.

"I wonder what kind of a person Mr. Poznanski is," mused the rabbi, as the boat steamed through the harbor and approached a busy wharf at the foot of one of the main streets.

He did not have long to wait because Mr. Poznanski was right there on the wharf to meet him. He was a tall man, middle-aged, with a lock of hair carefully brushed down over his forehead and sideburns framing his haughty face. A dark frock coat with velvet collar exposed an impeccably white pleated shirt with a starched stock that reached almost to his chin, and this southern aristocrat wore fawn colored trousers, spats, and elegantly polished shoes. Mr. Poznanski was accompanied by a shorter man with black hair and dark eyes. Both wore pearl-grey top hats which they removed as they stepped forward to greet the visitor.

"Do I have the pleasure of addressing Dr. Wise?" Poznanski asked, as the rabbi walked hesitantly along the wharf.

"Yes, I am Rabbi Wise."

Poznanski drew himself up to his full height, extended his hand and said, "May I present Dr. Rodriques, a distinguished member of our congregation."

The rabbi and the doctor shook hands. Rabbi Wise looked around for his baggage, assuming that the formalities of the occasion were completed. But Mr. Poznanski, fixing him with an imperious look, proceeded to begin a studied address of welcome. He went on for several minutes, ending with, ". . . and thus, suh, it is my privilege and honor to welcome you in behalf of Temple Beth Elohim."

Rabbi Wise suppressed a smile as he thanked Mr. Poznanski for his words of welcome. He was amazed by the formality of the occasion and found it difficult to understand some

of his host's words, delivered in a broad southern accent with a Polish overtone.

Mr. Poznanski turned around, snapped his fingers, and an elderly Negro with close-cropped, grizzled hair came forward at a run. "Take Dr. Wise's bags, Roscoe, and meet us quickly at the carriage."

"Yessuh, Marsa Poznanski," the man said, with a smile of welcome to Rabbi Wise as he hurried off.

"Roscoe is one of my slaves, Dr. Wise, an old family retainer. It is my pleasure to place him at your disposal during your visit. He will tend the grate fire, draw your water, run errands, and make himself useful in any way you need him. Since you are from the North, may I add the advice that you should find things for him to do. Don't spoil him like some northern folks do to our slaves and servants when they pay us a visit down here."

"A slave . . . at my disposal," thought Rabbi Wise. "How on earth shall I find anything for him to do? What kind of a place is this?" Trying to appear at his ease, he thanked Mr. Poznanski.

With the baggage stowed behind and Roscoe and a Negro driver in the front seat, the rabbi sat between Mr. Poznanski and Dr. Rodriques for the ride to the hotel. The horse set off at a trot. Poznanski leaned towards Rabbi Wise and spoke in a low voice, "We have invited you hither to defend our principles, and since these are possibly unknown to you, I place myself at your service to impart them to you."

"Thanks, that is not necessary," he answered quietly. "I have come to set forth *my* principles."

Dr. Rodriques, turning towards Dr. Wise, extended his

hand. "In truth, you are the man for Charleston," he exclaimed, enthusiastically.

Unmoved by this interruption, Mr. Poznanski persisted in his attempt to instruct the visiting rabbi. He lit a cheroot, savored the smoke and continued. "You are new in this country while I have been here for many years. You must try to understand our way of life. Here in Charleston it is considered good form in society to sit quietly with folded hands. When you speak in public you must speak slowly and deliberately. Since I observe that your speech contains evidence of your Germanic background I should be happy to help you recast your manuscript in better English form."

The more Mr. Poznanski continued to speak in his patronizing way, the more Rabbi Wise grew restless, torn between anger and a desire to laugh at his host. "If my sermons contain German expressions," he thought, "I am sure that the sermons of this intolerable snob contain Polish expressions." But he tried to hide his feelings and remain on formal good terms with the man who served the congregation as leader.

In spite of his dislike for Mr. Poznanski, Rabbi Wise was deeply impressed with what he found in Charleston. He had never before visited the deep south. He admired the bustling seaport, the brilliant pink, red, magenta, and purple bloom of azaleas, oleanders and crepe myrtle, the delicate tracery of iron grille work on balconies above the streets. He was housed in splendid rooms at the hotel, appointed with marble-topped tables, comfortable chairs, and a huge four-poster bed.

The people were generous in extending hospitality to their guest. He enjoyed all of it very much except the presence

of Roscoe, the slave. Opposed to slavery as he was, the rabbi did not know how to deal with the unaccustomed problem. He simply did not know what to tell the slave to do. The man dangled at the rabbi's heels unless sent off on some errand. At night he slept on a straw pallet on the floor of the foyer leading to the bedroom of the hotel suite. But the problem of what to do with the slave was not the final embarrassment of this visit.

Rabbi Wise learned that Mr. Poznanski was to debate Rabbi Morris J. Raphall with respect to whether it was proper to attempt to adapt Judaism to changing conditions and needs. Rabbi Raphall was a strong supporter of the Orthodox position. Mr. Poznanski was well known for the courage with which he had defended the use of the organ during divine service at Congregation Beth Elohim. He had also introduced prayers and discourses in English, had spoken against the idea of Jewish national restoration in Palestine, the rebuilding of the ancient Temple, and the hope of reestablishing, after a lapse of almost two thousand years, the custom of animal sacrifice as described in the Bible. The new temple at Charleston had been dedicated in 1841, at which time Mr. Poznanski had spoken the following words:

This synagogue is our *temple*, this city our *Jerusalem*, this happy land our *Palestine*, and as our fathers defended with their lives *that* temple, *that* city, and *that* land, so will our sons defend *this* temple, *this* city, and *this* land. . . .

Rabbi Wise was basically in agreement with Mr. Poznanski and looked forward to the debate with keen anticipation.

When the time came, the rabbi was asked to sit on the platform of a crowded hall, brightly illumined by gas chandeliers. Mr. Poznanski wore full dress and looked his usual stiff, formal self. After Rabbi Raphall had set forth his position to the effect that Judaism could not be changed unless a new Sanhedrin, supreme court and law-making body, were to be convened in Palestine, Mr. Poznanski sought to show how Judaism had changed in the past and must now be modified if it were to live.

"Nineteenth-century American Jews can no longer be called upon to pray for the restoration of an ancient religious cult which, even in the days when the First Temple stood, was the object of attack by the great prophets of Israel," Mr. Poznanski emphasized his point with a sharp blow of his hand on the lectern. Rabbi Raphall turned pale. Rabbi Wise blushed. The air in the closely-packed auditorium grew hot and stuffy and feet began to stir as the speaker touched on issues which divided the people.

Following the formal presentations, the debaters began asking each other questions. The chazan continued to speak forcefully, but in his usual controlled, measured manner. But Rabbi Raphall became very excited, shouted, and waved his arms about. He grew very angry at what he considered the heretical statements of Mr. Poznanski, and he had the feeling that Rabbi Wise sided with the liberal position against him. Unable to restrain himself any longer he turned to Rabbi Wise and thundered these questions, "Do *you* believe in the coming of the Messiah? Do *you* believe in the resurrection of the dead?"

Rabbi Wise answered him in one word, a loud and deci-

sive, "No!" Raphall snatched up his papers, and left the hall, followed by those who sided with him. Thus the debate ended.

On Saturday morning Rabbi Wise walked from the hotel to the synagogue on Hasell Street. The building had been erected only ten years before to replace the one which had been destroyed by fire in 1838. Like many houses in Charleston, the entrance to the synagogue was at right angles to the street, thus permitting the ark holding the Torah to be placed in the eastern wall, facing Jerusalem. The temple was set in a tidy green park marked off from the street by a beautifully wrought black iron fence. Passing between two of the massive Doric columns, he paused to admire the marble tablet upon which was inscribed the *Sh'ma*, the most important prayer text in Judaism (Deuteronomy 6:4), and its translation, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is the sole Eternal Being."

After responding to the greeting of Mr. Poznanski and Dr. Rodriques, Rabbi Wise took his place near the mahogany ark upon which he read the verse: "Know Before Whom Thou Standest." The magnificent synagogue was filled with a large congregation, all of whom wanted to hear the visitor preach the word of God. At the appropriate time Mr. Poznanski introduced Rabbi Wise in a formal, memorized speech. Wise spoke informally, touching the hearts of his listeners as he developed his theme: the effect which the kind of beliefs a man holds has on the conduct of his daily life. He made a warm plea for perseverance in the reform of Judaism to make it understandable and vital in the lives of Jewish young people. He spoke with fervor of the future growth

and influence of the ancient faith in the New World.

Even while he was speaking, Rabbi Wise knew that the congregation was well pleased with what he had to say. After the services were over the people lingered at the door to clasp his hand and to express their appreciation of his sermon. Shortly after, the Board of the congregation elected him to serve as rabbi of Beth Elohim. Rabbi Wise returned to Albany, restored to health and in high spirits, with every intention of moving to Charleston.

Back home, however, he found it necessary to decline the new position. His friends urged him insistently to remain, promising that the members of the opposition would no longer be able to impede his progressive program. Shaken by their pledge and the sincerity of their desire for him to stay on as spiritual leader, he was hesitant.

Theresa finally decided the issue when she was told that yellow fever raged frequently in Charleston and that as a result the climate was most unhealthy. Their third child and first son, Leo, was just an infant, and Theresa did not want to expose him and Emily, as well as her husband and herself, to what she believed was a dangerous environment.

"Please, Isaac," she pleaded, "write them a note thanking them and declining the honor. I'd rather stay in Albany than move so far south."

Rabbi Wise decided to remain where he had been for the past four years, even though he knew in his heart that the opposition in Albany was only temporarily quiet, that Louis Spanier and his cronies were waiting for an opportunity to strike.



7. ANSHE EMETH, MEN OF TRUTH

SHORTLY AFTER HIS RETURN FROM CHARLESTON, RABBI WISE READ the following words in *The Occident*:

Since Wise declared publicly and decidedly in Charleston that he does not believe in the personal Messiah nor in the bodily resurrection, he is no longer fit to act as rabbi or religious teacher of a Jewish congregation, and hence he should be removed from his post in Albany as soon as possible.

RABBI MORRIS J. RAPHAEL

Perhaps it was because of Raphael's attacks, perhaps there were other reasons, in any case storm gathered about the life of the rabbi of Albany shortly after he decided to remain

there instead of moving to Charleston. Temple Bethel had an annual business meeting at which the members elected Louis Spanier president of the congregation. He gathered the rabbi's strongest opponents about him, determined to destroy his influence and to return the congregation to its former position. The struggle began during the summer of 1850 with a series of minor mysteries.

The first was the case of the drinking chazan. Although the congregation had a well-trained choir, the musical service was still under the direction of the cantor. There had been a time when this man was given to drinking and playing cards in the local saloons. In a firm but friendly manner Dr. Wise had won him over from these habits. On the strength of the chazan's good intentions the rabbi had permitted him to continue in his work and had even appointed him as an assistant teacher in the school. Now the chazan suddenly went back to his old habits, neglected his family, and brought shame upon the congregation and the school. This puzzled Rabbi Wise because he knew that although the man was weak, he would not have endangered his job unless someone in authority had urged him on. Rabbi Wise lectured him about his conduct, and the matter was passed over for the time being.

On the following Sabbath a second peculiar thing happened. When Rabbi Wise went to the closet to take out his rabbinical robe before services, he found that it had disappeared and no one admitted knowing anything about it. Rabbi Wise was suspicious about the incident, but pretended not to be, insisting that the articles simply had been stolen.

The next unfortunate event was more serious. As a result

of the rabbi's urging, all Board members and officers of the congregation had agreed not to work or do business on the Sabbath. Now one of them, a storekeeper, opened his place of business on a Saturday. Rabbi Wise visited him, reminded him how difficult it was to reintroduce the observance of the Sabbath in America, and urged him to live up to the agreement. The storekeeper refused to close the store or to resign from the Board and told the rabbi curtly to mind his own business.

On the next Sabbath, just before the rabbi was about to preach his sermon, the sexton handed him a note from the *parnas*, the president, Mr. Spanier. It read, "The *parnas* serves notice on you not to preach today."

Rabbi Wise always insisted on freedom in the pulpit, the right of the minister to speak to the people as his conscience dictated. He began at once to preach even though the president stood in front of him, calling out, "I tell you, you shall not preach today."

When it became clear that he could not stop the rabbi, Mr. Spanier and his friends left the synagogue in anger.

There was now an open state of war within the congregation. The opposition refused to pay their dues to the congregation. They also failed to pay tuition fees to the school, although their children continued to receive education there. Rabbi Wise was not too disturbed by this. His credit was good and his material needs were modest. He continued to perform his duties as if nothing were wrong.

Then a set of formal charges was drawn up against him. The president and his party demanded that he be discharged. They pointed out that he denied the future com-

ing of a personal Messiah and that he did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead, both doctrines of Orthodox Judaism about which many people had their doubts. They made other charges, some untrue, all of them petty. They claimed that he had been seen writing on Rosh Ha-shono, an act prohibited in Orthodox practice.

In spite of the seriousness of his situation, Rabbi Wise could not help laughing at one of the charges, the one that read, "They heard that on a Sabbath he was seen swinging himself in the Mineral Spring Garden (Geschwungen in a Schwing)."

"You see, Theresa," he smiled at his wife in an effort to cheer her up, "it is a serious theological matter if you swing on a swing on the Sabbath. You may sit there, but from now on, whatever you do, don't swing."

"I know, Isaac, it's very funny. But what is going to become of us?"

"I am not a prophet, neither am I a prophet's son," but I do not believe that Louis Spanier and his group will speak the last word about Reform Judaism in America."

It was a custom that the annual business meeting of the congregation should be held the night after Rosh Ha-shono, the religious New Year's Day. During the week before Rosh Ha-shono in 1850 a large fair was being held in Albany. Everyone was busy. The streets were filled with horses and carts. Hundreds of mules were tethered in vacant lots while the farmers from miles around visited the fair and went shopping in the stores. Eating places were crowded and boys in boots and peaked caps strolled along the plank sidewalks singing and strumming on banjos. Be-

cause he assumed that many members would not be able to attend, since they would be busy on account of the fair, Louis Spanier called the congregational meeting for three o'clock of a week-day afternoon instead of waiting for the night after Rosh Ha-shono, but Rabbi Wise's friends came anyhow.

The charges against Rabbi Wise were read. A debate followed for eight hours. By eleven o'clock that night it was plain that neither side would give in. The president refused to recognize a motion for adjournment, hoping to wear down the friends of the rabbi by keeping them there all night.

The vice-president of the congregation, Joseph Sporberg, finally secured the right to speak. "This has gone on for eight hours," he shouted in a hoarse voice. "It is a disgrace to our community that special business of such a nature should be brought before a meeting without advance notice to the members. This debate is as illegal as the charges are foolish. Since the president will not abide by parliamentary rules, as vice-president it is my duty to vindicate the law. I recognize the motion for adjournment. All in favor?"

Mr. Sporberg listened to the chorus of "ayes" and declared the meeting at an end. He and his friends left, but Louis Spanier then went back to the chair, declared the meeting was not adjourned, and proceeded with business. Only forty-three members, including a minority of the Board of Trustees, remained. The rump meeting sustained the charges against the rabbi, deposed him from office, and decided not to pay the back salary already due him. All

this happened just five months after the same people had prevented Rabbi Wise from moving to Charleston and had prevailed upon him to remain in Albany.

The next evening the rabbi's loyal friends held a meeting. They decided not to be ruled by such action but to proceed legally against President Spanier and his clique. They consulted the attorney-general of the state of New York, who advised Rabbi Wise to appear in the synagogue at the hour of service in official garb and to try to perform his duty. If violence were attempted, then the law would sustain him. If, however, he did not appear at the synagogue to perform his normal functions, then his contract would be broken.

On the morning of Rosh Ha-shono, Dr. Wise went to the synagogue, found his seat occupied by one of Spanier's friends, and took another seat near the ark. He later described what happened in these words, "Excitement ruled the hour. Everything was quiet as the grave. Finally, the choir sings Sulzer's great 'En Komocho.' At the conclusion of the song I stepped before the ark to take out the scrolls of the law as usual and to offer prayer. Spanier steps in my way and without saying a word smites me with his fist so that my cap falls from my head. This was the signal for an uproar, the like of which I never experienced. The people acted like furies. It was as though the synagogue had burst forth in a flaming conflagration. Within two minutes the whole assembly was a struggling mass. I finally reached home bowed with pain and inexpressible grief."

Rabbi Wise would not have preferred charges against Louis Spanier except for the fact that when he said to him,

"Louis Spanier, there is a law to which I can appeal," Spanier replied, "I have a hundred thousand dollars more than you. I do not fear the law. I will ruin you."

The case of Dr. Wise against Louis Spanier for assault and battery was tried the following May. The court held that the rabbi was merely trying to fulfil his duty on that fateful Rosh Ha-shono, that only a minority of the congregation had sought to cancel his contract, that the action was illegal, and "that the defendant committed an assault and battery on the minister in the pulpit in the presence of the congregation, and when he was told by the plaintiff that the arm of justice should reach him, he answered he was too rich to fear the law." The jury sustained Dr. Wise and awarded him one thousand dollars in damages. The rabbi never sought to collect the money. Louis Spanier soon resigned as president, left Albany, and died a few years later.

Meanwhile, Theresa was worried about the future and Rabbi Wise once more doubted the wisdom of his decision to fight for the creation of a vital Judaism in America. Many possibilities opened before him.

His friend, Chief Justice Wood, said, "This was necessary. Ordinary insults could not bring you to reason." He had a plan for the rabbi. He should announce his intention of turning to the practice of law. On the very next day he would take the bar examination and be admitted to the practice of law. Wood would then find an office, and he and the former rabbi would become partners in what was certain to be a successful practice. "I am an old jurist, you are a splendid speaker; nothing further is necessary." A

group of lawyers came up and greeted the rabbi as a colleague. Since preparation for the practice of law was quite informal, the plan could be easily carried out.

That afternoon, however, the rabbi found himself alone in his study. The rows of books seemed to send forth a silent warning. There were the Bible, the ancient commentaries, the *Guide* of Maimonides, the works on Jewish history. They seemed to say, "Hast thou not suffered, hungered, waked, struggled with untoward circumstances in order to serve the faith of thy fathers? Where are thy resolutions, thy holy vows that God alone has heard? Where is thy zeal, thy enthusiasm, thy love for the heritage of Israel? Was all that merely stage play? Wilt thou leave thy post and betray the holy cause to its blinded enemies?" Surrounded by these silent witnesses Rabbi Wise bowed his head in prayer. It was then that he realized he could never turn to any life work other than the task to which he had dedicated his life: the forging of a vital Judaism for the modern world.

That night a friend called at the Wise home and asked the rabbi to come with him to a meeting. They came to a hall where Rabbi Wise found members of the congregation and a large number of young people assembled, with Joseph Sporberg presiding over the meeting. They informed him that all had withdrawn from the Bethel congregation and had formed a new one. They were prepared to furnish a temporary synagogue, purchase land for a cemetery, raise funds with which to buy or build a permanent temple. The people were ready and the necessary funds would be raised, if only Rabbi Wise would agree to

remain in Albany as spiritual leader of the new congregation.

The rabbi sat down and passed his hand slowly across his broad forehead to hide the tears that welled up in his eyes against his will. Whatever doubts remained as to his future course, they were soon dissipated when his old friend, Dr. Lewi, arose and spoke directly to him.

"We all recognize that this is a critical moment for American Judaism, which must be either thoroughly reformed or die. We recognize no less clearly that you are the bearer of the new idea, which will conquer or fall with you. We are ready to stand by you to the end, and to sacrifice everything in our power. If we endure, the Orthodox party will soon perceive that it gave itself the death blow last Rosh Ha-shono. If we fail, Judaism will fall with us."

Rabbi Wise agreed to stay. He named the new congregation, *Anshe Emeth*, "Men of Truth." A third story loft was rented and rude benches were nailed together. Two scrolls of the law were purchased and the new congregation was ready to hold services for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The entire congregation was present, along with the choir, all of whom had decided to follow Dr. Wise. A spirit of devotion and exaltation pervaded the assembly. All day long the worshippers stayed in the barren room that served as their new house of prayer. Out of the tragedy of the old congregation there arose a band of courageous and spirited champions of Progressive Judaism. Rabbi Wise wrote many years later, "On that Yom Kippur I saw American Judaism arise out of the grave, to go forth to ever new triumphs."



8. WIDER HORIZONS

AFTER THE HOLY DAYS IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT RABBI WISE speak in various cities and raise funds to help the new group acquire a permanent temple building. He set off on a trip which took him to New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore.

Wherever he went he talked enthusiastically about his plans for the growth of Reform Judaism. In Philadelphia he was offered the position of rabbi at congregation Rodeph Shalom. In Washington he met with Daniel Webster, Secretary of State, and was received by President Millard Fillmore.

To his amazement the President told him that he had responded to a request from friends in Albany that he ap-

point him to a position with the Library of Congress. This position would be available to him starting next January 1. Resolved to carry on his efforts in behalf of Judaism, Rabbi Wise declined the generous offer of the President.

During his visit with Daniel Webster in the Secretary of State's office, Lieut. Maury, a famous expert in meteorology, the science of weather and climates, and Senator Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana were shown in. Senator Benjamin was a heavy-set man with black hair, a strong, aquiline nose, and habitually smiling lips. He spoke in a deep, resonant voice with a southern drawl.

After the introductions had been made, Daniel Webster turned to Judah P. Benjamin, and said, "Mr. Senator, my friend is of your race. I would have said your co-religionist, but I do not know how much or how little you believe; and in truth we four are all co-religionists, since we are all Unitarians."

Lieut. Maury objected to this, not being sure that he was a Unitarian.

Senator Benjamin also expressed disagreement, and then added, "I suggest that the four of us dine together tonight and debate the subject of religion."

The others agreed and Senator Benjamin invited them to join him in a private dining-room at Willard's Hotel that night.

Dressed for the occasion, Rabbi Wise went to Willard's Hotel at the appointed hour. He was shown to the room reserved for Senator Benjamin's party and found the senator supervising the setting of the table. Soon after they had greeted each other, Mr. Webster and Lieut. Maury arrived.

Benjamin took a bottle of champagne from an ice-bucket, eased out the cork, and filled all the glasses.

"A toast, gentlemen, to your health and the prosperity of our conversation tonight."

They drained their glasses, the rabbi coughing discreetly as the sparkling wine tickled his nose and mouth.

Dinner was served, starting with a hearty potage, and the conversation began.

Daniel Webster asked Rabbi Wise what he understood as the meaning of Unitarian religion. The rabbi said that to him it meant the worship of one God, and cited the remarks of the noted liberal minister, Theodore Parker, to the effect that the real meaning of religion was the worship of God and the service of man.

Daniel Webster broke in, "It is well. You are indeed my co-religionist."

Lieut. Maury agreed, saying that he, too, was a co-religionist in the light of what the rabbi had to say about Theodore Parker.

"Yes," Rabbi Wise went on, "Judaism is distinctive in history, emphasis, and form, but its doctrine is basically Unitarian and its world view is prophetic."

All three men looked at Benjamin. During the course of the conversation he had admitted his ignorance of Judaism. Still, he refused to agree with the rabbi.

"My ancestors were Orthodox Jews of S'fardic descent," he asserted. "I admit that I know very little about Judaism. My feeling is that if you want to be a Jew religiously then you must accept the dogmas of the Orthodox belief and be separated in all things religious from non-Jews."

"Just like some of my congregational members," thought Rabbi Wise, "who insist on Jewish separateness but are perfectly satisfied to remain ignorant of Judaism." Turning to Senator Benjamin, he said, "If I may summarize your point, Mr. Benjamin, what you seem to say is that Orthodox Judaism is the kind of religion to which you prefer *not* to be loyal."

It was late when the dinner party was finished and Rabbi Wise walked thoughtfully to his hotel.

The rabbi returned to Albany refreshed in spirit and with a considerable fund towards the acquisition of a new temple for the congregation.

This project came to successful conclusion much sooner than anyone had hoped. In the summer of 1851 a Quaker friend named Schoolcraft, a member of the Congress of the United States, was in a position to offer the congregation a large church building at a reasonable price and on generous terms. The building had been a Baptist church. The congregation bought this building, redecorated it, and dedicated it to the worship of the one God on October 3, 1851. The service of dedication was a great event, attended by many state and city officials. Rabbi Max Lilienthal of New York preached a sermon in German and Rabbi Wise spoke in English. The temple was packed with enthusiastic men and women.

Peace and harmony continued in the new congregation. The church had been equipped with family pews, and the members of Anshe Emeth agreed with Rabbi Wise that one of the aims of the Reform movement should be the equality of women with men in the synagogue. In former



**The farm home of the
Wise family in Cincinnati.**



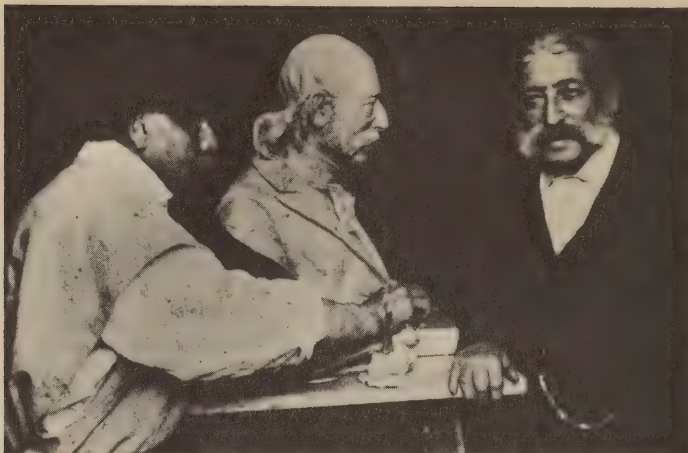
**Selma Bondi Wise, second
wife of Isaac Mayer Wise,
and mother of Rabbi
Jonah B. Wise.**



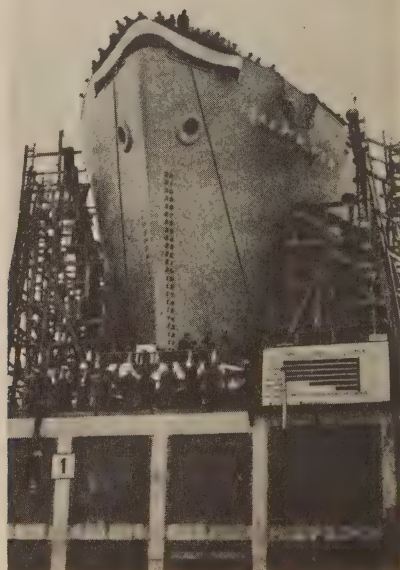


Upper: An interior view of the Plum Street Temple, showing the rich wood paneling.

Left: The magnificent Plum Street building of B'nai Yeshurun in Cincinnati.



**Sir Moses Ezekiel, sculptor,
doing the head of Dr. Wise.
The bust now stands in the
lobby of the House of Living
Judaism in New York City.**



**The "S.S. Isaac Mayer Wise,"
one of the wartime fleet of
Liberty Ships being launched
on December 6, 1944.**

years women had occupied a secondary position in the synagogues. The sign of this situation was the women's gallery where the women and girls were separated from the men and boys during divine service. Since the new congregation believed in the emancipation of women, the family pews were retained so that, for the first time in Albany, Jewish men, women, and children sat together and participated equally in the worship and other activities of the synagogue.

It had always been the practice of Rabbi Wise to permit instrumental music at services. Now the question arose as to whether it was proper to play the organ on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Wise did not want to press the point because he did not want to offend the feelings of any who might be opposed to it. One member, who, it was assumed, would not like to have it done was asked for his opinion. He replied, "If the organ is not to be played on Yom Kippur, our holiest day, of what use is it?" That settled the issue and the organ was used to accompany the Holy Day music of Sulzer and Naumburg.

While this was happening, Rabbi Wise's father died in Bohemia. He mourned for his father, recalling his many sacrifices and determined to save enough money to send a ticket to his mother for her passage to America. It was a great day for the Wise family when Regina was greeted by her son in New York. Rabbi Wise wept when he saw how his mother had aged and how frail she looked.

"Little mother," he said, "be comforted. We are glad you have made the long journey, and we shall try to help you find a happy life here."

Regina Wise went with Theresa and her son to Albany.

She was proud of the respect in which her son was held by the members of the congregation and many others in the community. "I see that you are building a new house for our ancient faith here in America," she said. In a few weeks the rabbi took his mother on to Peoria, Illinois, where there were older members of her family.

One of the leaders of the revolutionary movement in the Old World at this time was Lajos Kossuth, editor of a liberal paper, and chief of the Hungarian movement for freedom. He issued a Hungarian declaration of independence and was appointed governor of what was to have been a free Hungary. Following the defeat of the revolution, Kossuth was held prisoner in Turkey for two years. In 1851 he came to the United States as a guest of the government and traveled about making speeches in favor of independence for Hungary.

Rabbi Wise was greatly attracted to the Hungarian patriot and to his cause. As a native of neighboring Bohemia, who had not returned to Europe in 1848, he felt he should do something to further the attempt for Hungarian freedom. He spoke and wrote in behalf of the cause of democracy and freedom in central Europe.

Soon after these events, Rabbi Wise learned that it had become the custom to open sessions of the State Legislature at Albany with a prayer offered by one of the local clergymen. In every case the clergyman chosen was a Christian minister. Rabbi Wise discussed this matter with his friends, Wood and Dean and Streeter. He pointed out that the lawmakers represented all the people and that if prayers were to be offered at their sessions, then the rabbi of the

community should be invited to participate along with the other religious leaders.

Soon after Rabbi Wise received an invitation: "Reverend Dr. Wise, we want you to open the next session of the Senate of the state of New York with prayer." Strong opposition developed from fundamentalists who protested that New York was a Christian state and the United States a Christian nation. "It would be improper to have a rabbi serve as chaplain to an American lawmaking body," they said.

When Rabbi Wise heard of the opposition, he was greatly angered. He hastened to draw up a brief pointing out that the United States is not a Christian nation, but one that is equally home to all of its loyal citizens, regardless of the religion they profess, or whether they profess any at all. He cited the opinion of George Washington to the same effect and quoted the Constitution of the United States, which provides that "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States," and which also states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . . ." He had his statement printed and, with the help of a friend, placed on the desk of each legislator in the state capital the very morning after he had learned of the attempt to stop his appointment.

The prompt action of the rabbi was taken as a kind of joke at the expense of his opponents. Many a lawmaker chuckled as he read the statement of the rabbi, already on his desk, when the fundamentalists assumed that he did not know of the plot they were hatching. The legislature voted to invite the rabbi to serve as chaplain by a large

majority. When the day came, Rabbi Wise stood before the Senate of the state of New York. The senators arose and the room quieted down as the rabbi offered the prayer in a clear voice touched with emotion:

Lord of Hosts, Rock of Salvation, whose unlimited power, wisdom, and love are revealed in the innumerable millions of creatures that populate the universe, whose providence, special care, and benignity are revealed in every page of the history of nations, hear our supplications, listen graciously to our petitions that we offer unto Thee in behalf of our beloved country and her faithful legislators who have assembled again to give us laws and regulations to the promotion of liberty, prosperity, justice, and humanity. O Lord, Thou who hast inspired and assisted our ancestors when they arose lion-hearted against their oppressors and bought for the warm blood of their hearts the liberty and independence of these United States; inspire, our Father, O inspire our legislature with the same spirit of truth and justice, with the same love of liberty and independence, with the same desire to promote happiness and prosperity among their fellow citizens; remove prejudice, partiality, and factional endeavors from every mind; give unto them the same spirit as the venerable fathers of this republic manifested; let them be freely united in the discharge of the sacred duty to their country that she may bloom and prosper before Thee; that she may be an example of

liberty, equity, and humanity; that she may
 be imitated by those nations that still suffer
 and sigh under the iron rod of despotism;
 that her citizens be united before Thee to do
 Thy sacred will, to proclaim Thy holy name.
 Blessed be the name of the Lord from sun-
 rise to sunset, from now to evermore. Amen.

As he approached his thirty-fifth birthday, Isaac Mayer Wise was already a nationally-known figure. He was a storm center, noted for his courage in advancing the cause of Liberal Judaism. He was also known as a creative teacher, scholar, and public servant whose interest centered in the Jewish community yet reached out to embrace American and world-wide problems as well.

He was somewhat heavier now. Although he still wore his hair in flowing style and still hurried about intent upon discharging his many responsibilities, there was maturity in his face. His eyes met the gaze of friends and foes with a steady look, the look of a champion who knows his own strength and is quick to assess yours.

In August, 1853, Rabbi Wise received a letter from Mr. Jacob Goodheart of Cincinnati, asking whether and on what conditions he would accept a call from Congregation B'nai Yeshurun of that city. Knowing of the high reputation of this congregation in the West, he replied that he would require six months in which to wind up his affairs in Albany, and that his salary would have to be such as to render him independent of any gifts from the members of the congregation. Five days later a telegram came from Cincinnati: "You were elected unanimously last night at your own terms."

The farewells in Albany consumed many days. The climax was a banquet at Stern's Hotel in honor of Dr. Wise and his family. The mayor of the city was there and the governor of New York sent his personal representative. Moses Schloss spoke of the past eight years, "Albany now has two congregations instead of one," he said. "The influence of our beloved rabbi has been felt by all of us, Reform and Orthodox, by non-Jewish neighbors and friends as well as by the Jewish community. Judaism is respected in our city and all of us are proud of our rabbi. He has taught the children, helped us solve our problems, has consoled us in time of grief. Rabbi," he turned towards the rabbi and Theresa, "we want you to know that our loving thoughts will always be with you as you enter on a larger field of service."

The last speaker was the rabbi's oldest friend, Dr. Lewi. He told of the early days in Radnitz and recalled the circumstances in which the Wise family had decided to leave for the New World. "There were troubles in those days," he said, "troubles with the imperial officials, with the district rabbi, and with the congregation." He placed his hand on the rabbi's shoulder and smiled as he added, "I have heard that there have been certain difficulties along the way of progress even here in Albany. But the difficulties have been growing pains and the blessings have far outweighed the troubles."

Dr. Lewi turned to his chair and picked up a small package with a ribbon tied around it. The crowd waited expectantly while the speaker continued, his voice choked with emotion. "Rabbi, please accept this gift as a token of our love for you."

Dr. Lewi sat down and Rabbi Wise arose, holding the package in his hand, unable to speak because of the ovation

offered him by the people who had pushed back their chairs, stood up, and were now applauding heartily.

Theresa plucked at the corner of the rabbi's formal coat. "Open it, Isaac. Let's see what it is. They will like it that way."

Rabbi Wise removed the ribbon and the paper wrapping. He opened a jeweler's white box and carefully drew out a large gold watch. The crowd quieted down as he held up the watch and said, "It is beautiful. Look, Theresa, it has a hunting case." He pressed the little knob at the top of the watch and the case sprang open on its hinge, revealing the face and the inscription inside the lid of the hunting case: "To our rabbi, in deep appreciation, Congregation Anshe Emeth."

"For once I am at a loss for words," Rabbi Wise said. "My family and I thank you, dear friends, from the bottom of our hearts for your many kindnesses to us. Wherever I am, when I consult this beautiful timepiece, I shall think of you. It is my hope to be able to return to Albany and to find the members of the two congregations reunited as one, all working together in the service of our sacred cause."

After the applause following the remarks of the rabbi had died down, Professor Amos Dean acted as toastmaster. He introduced many of the rabbi's friends and regaled the members of the party with tales of what went on when the cronies gathered together in the State Library.

Two days later, on April 20, 1854, the Wise family left Albany by train for Cincinnati. It was a happy journey as the family looked out through the train window at the fruit trees in blossom, green fields dotted with flocks of sheep and

playful lambs, all bathed in mild sunshine. Rabbi Wise smiled at Theresa and the little ones. He lit his cigar and wondered what lay in store for them in the Queen City of the West.



9. QUEEN CITY OF THE WEST

RABBI WISE FELT AT HOME IN CINCINNATI. THE CITY WAS A center of commerce, industry, and of cultural expression. He enjoyed walking along the trim residential streets lined with maple and chestnut trees. He admired the houses of stone and brick. There was a substantial air about the city, a solid character imparted to it by the many people who had settled here from former homes in Germany. The business center on Third Street housed shops and offices. Below Third, the land sloped down to the Ohio River. He liked to visit the water-front where blocks of buildings four stories high contained the riches of America, borne to the city on flat-bottomed river boats. The white boats fascinated him and he never tired of seeing them come and go at the

wharf, their funnels belching black smoke, their giant side-wheels or stern paddles churning the muddy water of the broad river. On the far shore he could see the green, rounded hills of Kentucky, where the South began. On the wharf itself Negro stevedores came and went, toting the burdens of commerce, plowing their way through bustling crowds of merchants and commission men. River captains and pilots were there, men who seemed confused on shore, their authority over events in a world afloat suspended for the time being.

The rabbi found himself as busy as the rest of the people in the Queen City of the West. America was building and so was the holy congregation called B'nai Yeshurun. Dr. Wise was installed not only as rabbi of the congregation but as director of the Talmud Yelodim Institute as well. This was the school where, just as in Albany, the children received their general as well as their Jewish education. In his very first sermon in April the rabbi told his congregation that he intended to press for changes in the old-fashioned way of doing things, and to institute the same reforms he had achieved in Albany.

After the service the rabbi and Theresa were guests of the president of the congregation, Marcus Fechheimer, and his wife. The four of them walked from the synagogue to the Fechheimer home. After dinner the men went into the library where the president motioned Dr. Wise to a comfortable leather chair.

"Would you like a little brandy, Rabbi?" he asked.

The rabbi agreed. Mr. Fechheimer poured the brandy from a cut-glass decanter.

"I was much interested in your message this morning. Since you are new to our community, it may be helpful for me to tell you that the program you suggest is just what we have been waiting for. I think you will find many loyal followers in our congregation."

"That is why I accepted the call to come to Cincinnati," Dr. Wise replied. "I believe that here in the West we may find it easier to blaze new trails than in the East where people are more given to following old ways."

"Quite so," the president continued. "However, unless I misjudge you, you are not to be satisfied with building up one modern congregation. What is needed is a movement of national scope. A national movement requires institutions capable of giving direction. At the present time each group, each rabbi, even each president of a congregation is a world by itself. They do not think of coming together in pursuit of common aims. Each one is by and for himself alone. How can you hope to bring unity and order into the American Jewish scene?"

"I feel dizzy," Rabbi Wise replied with a smile, "and I think it comes from the problems you raise rather than from this excellent brandy, of which I have sipped only a few drops. You are quite right. We must draw the congregations into a fraternal bond. The rabbis must also be brought together. Above all, we must seek a way of training American rabbis. The people of our congregations will not long be satisfied with leaders who look at life as Europeans instead of Americans, with men, even though they are worthy and admirable rabbis, who cannot speak to the new congregation in the English language. The task be-

fore us is so great that just thinking about it is enough to make anyone dizzy."

"You impress me as a man of action, Rabbi. Surely you have some concrete plans which we have not yet discussed. Tell me and I shall try to help."

"Very well. Of plans I have plenty. Theresa always complains that I am a dreamer and an idealist. But the first step is a practical one. I can reach more people by the written word than through my sermons and other addresses. My contributions are frequently not welcome in *The Occident*, which, as you know, is edited by Isaac Leeser, a fine man, but one who considers himself a defender of Orthodoxy. For a while I was editor of *The Asmonean*, but that paper does not have enough circulation or influence. I propose to found my own paper, a magazine to be published here in Cincinnati and devoted to spreading the idea of Reform. I have already secured some subscriptions and promises of contributions and other aid. What do you think of that?"

"It's a fine idea, and I see I was right in describing you as a man of action," Mr. Fechheimer smiled wryly. "But how will you find time to be both an editor and a rabbi?"

"I believe it can be done," Rabbi Wise replied, as he arose from his chair. "That and much more can be done." The men shook hands.

That week work began on the project of founding the magazine to be known as *The Israelite*, a name changed later on to *The American Israelite*. With the help of Marcus Fechheimer and Edward Bloch, Theresa's brother, who had also moved to Cincinnati, Rabbi Wise set out to find

a printer who would undertake the publishing of the new organ. At first it seemed as if no one would be willing to consider such a scheme. There were no Jews in the publishing business and the Christians whom Dr. Wise approached declared bluntly that the Jews who would subscribe to such a paper could not insure its success. The rabbi and Edward finally turned to the owner of the German language evening paper in Cincinnati, Dr. Schmidt, and agreed to make good any financial losses at the end of the year. This plan proved acceptable to the publisher. *The Israelite* would be launched.

"Theresa," the rabbi said to his wife at their noon meal, "I shall spend the afternoon in my study. Please don't call me unless there is an emergency. I have to decide what kind of a statement to send out about the new magazine."

An understanding smile lit up her face.

"I know, Isaac, you are about to decide whether to have a paper that will sell well or one that will tell the truth. I have a new approach . . . why not compromise and do a little of both?"

"Perhaps you are right, but I have to think about it. After all, I shall sign this advance notice as editor. What I write today will set the course for the future."

The rabbi locked himself in his study. He wrote page after page, only to tear them up, not satisfied with the result. The afternoon passed. Evening came and he forgot about dinner. Late that night he came to his decision. He stopped pacing the floor, sank down into the chair behind his desk and thought, "Come what may and how it may, I will not swerve a hair's breadth from my convictions.

Either I will build up a Judaism suited to the age and breathing the atmosphere of American freedom, or I will be buried beneath the ruins of the old Judaism. I do not wish to be rich nor honored, nor recognized, nor beloved. I will do my duty. I will remain true to my convictions." This time he wrote and did not destroy. The prospectus was printed and mailed the very next day.

As Rabbi Wise became well known throughout the city, the idea occurred to the members of a sister congregation called Bene Israel that he might serve them as rabbi along with the members of B'nai Yeshurun. It was proposed that Rabbi Wise speak Saturday morning at one synagogue and the same afternoon at the other. This was not adopted but Rabbi Wise did serve the congregation for about a year until the president of Bene Israel informed him that their congregation could secure the services of his old friend, Dr. Max Lilienthal of New York, as rabbi. Dr. Wise at once resigned from his second position so that Rabbi Lilienthal could come to Cincinnati from the East. Their reunion was an occasion of much rejoicing and they remained friends throughout the years.

It soon became plain that *The Israelite*, while an excellent publication for advancing the ideas of Judaism, was not going to be a money-maker. The magazine lost six hundred dollars during the first year. Many people praised it but few paid for their subscriptions.

Many of those who had promised to contribute articles to the magazine never sent them in. Rabbi Wise found that he had to write most of the contents himself. He enjoyed doing the editorials and found no difficulty in writing news

items. He had also promised his readers that *The Israelite* would carry novels about Jewish life. When he failed to interest writers in the project, the rabbi began the production of a long story based on Jewish history.

Each week he wrote a chapter exactly as long as the space in the paper permitted. This was a difficult chore and often led to embarrassing results, as in the following case which Rabbi Wise recorded. "Usually the manuscript went red hot from my pen to the printing-press, often without being checked, and generally without even having been outlined in advance. Once I forgot the name of the sweet heroine and gave her a different one the following week. It became plain that I had given the good Oppenheimer (the hero) two sweethearts. One of them had to go, and so, in spite of all the efforts of the rabbi, Naphtali Cohen, I let the poor girl burn to death in the Frankfort fire. That Friday, when this terrible chapter appeared, I spoiled the appetites of my dear lady readers for their fish. But Oppenheimer was saved; he had to marry only one girl."

Convinced that the way to succeed was to press forward instead of retreating, Rabbi Wise helped Edward Bloch found the Bloch Publishing Company in Cincinnati. They bought a Hebrew press and opened offices in a building at Third and Sycamore Streets. The hundreds of dollars in debts were promptly changed to thousands, but Rabbi Wise and Edward persevered in their project as publishers. Now there would be books about Judaism available in the English language.

Rabbi Wise was also convinced that the future of Judaism in America required that there be a union of congregations

and a college where students would be trained to become rabbis. He wrote about it often in *The Israelite*. Marcus Fechheimer and many other friends in Cincinnati joined with him to establish what they called the Zion Collegiate Association. Each member was to pay ten dollars a year. The money would be collected until such time as a new school to be called Zion College could be opened. At first the idea was well received. Three hundred people joined in Cincinnati alone, and branches of the Association were formed in New York, Louisville, and other cities.

In the fall of 1855 Zion College was opened in Cincinnati. There were fourteen students, twelve who hoped to become rabbis, two who were Christians seeking a deeper understanding of Jewish religion. There were three paid teachers while Rabbis Wise and Lilienthal taught without any salary. The start of the school year was the occasion of a banquet given in the Masonic Hall. The governor-elect of Ohio, later chief justice, Salmon P. Chase, was among the speakers. There was a great deal of enthusiasm at the start, but it soon became clear that people in the East could not be counted on to continue their help. The branch of the Association in New York soon closed. Selfish leaders who were unhappy at the success of the project attacked Zion College bitterly. After a short and stormy life, Zion College had to be closed for lack of support.

As early as 1848 Rabbi Wise had called for the formation of a union or federation of American Jewish congregations. Now that Zion College had failed, he determined to try again to bring the congregations together so as to secure support for a seminary and many other projects that were needed if Judaism were to grow in the United States.

"I have just sent out still another appeal for a meeting on a national level," he told his friend, Marcus Fechheimer.

"Isaac," Fechheimer pushed his chair back from the roll top desk in his office so as to face his visitor directly, "I admire your spirit. Never say die. Whom have you invited this time?"

"I have invited all of the most prominent rabbis and I have asked them to sound out their lay leaders so that we may form a synod of both rabbis and laymen. The first response came from Isaac Leiser in Philadelphia. Since he promised to come I have hopes that this time we may unite all the groups, Orthodox, and Reform as well."

"Let's hope for the best," Fechheimer said, thoughtfully, "but you must be prepared to withstand defeat if the time is not yet ripe for unity."

As the replies came in Rabbi Wise became more and more hopeful. The atmosphere both at home and at the temple was charged with excited anticipation as he answered letters, wrote preliminary drafts of statements for the conference, and finally prepared to set off by train for Cleveland.

In the conference city everything went well. The delegates met in a spirit of brotherhood, apparently devoted to the common good. The first tense moment came when the Resolutions Committee submitted a plank to the effect that the Talmud should be recognized as the true interpretation of the laws in the Bible. Some of the Reform leaders were opposed to this but Rabbi Wise, seeking to save the unity of the conference, asked for the floor.

"Gentlemen," he addressed the delegates, "we all know that the Talmud is in effect an interpretation of the Bible.

Many commentaries have been written on the Talmud in turn, so that all do not understand its teachings exactly the same way. Let us remain united in the service of our sacred cause. There is no reason why we should not all agree in principle to the authoritative character of the Talmud in the teaching of Judaism. I move the adoption of the resolution."

Rabbi Wise sat down during a burst of applause. The resolution was adopted and the synod set up on a united basis. A committee was appointed to draft a new edition of the prayer book. Several colleagues were appointed to this committee along with Dr. Wise.

The rabbi returned home in high spirits. "Theresa," his voice shook with excitement, "this time we have won. The union of all Israelites in America is well on the way."

Meanwhile, a different scene was taking place in the rabbi's study of Congregation Har Sinai in the eastern seaport of Baltimore. Two men sat fearfully on the edges of their chairs while Rabbi David Einhorn, the spiritual leader of the congregation recently arrived from Germany, paced angrily up and down like a caged beast. His eyes seemed to emit jets of flame as he violently opened a copy of the most recent issue of *The Israelite* from Cincinnati.

"Read this filthy sheet," he demanded in a thunderous voice. "Is this the level of Reform Judaism in America? 'Rabbi Wise of Cincinnati agrees to compromise regarding the authority of the Talmud.' I have suffered persecution in the Old World so as to fight against Jewish superstition and ignorance. I call this action the foul peace of Cleveland. Read it for yourselves. We must raise funds at

once to publish a paper that will stand for genuine reform. I shall call it *Sinai*. I shall edit it myself so as to counteract the weak-kneed compromise proposed by Wise."

The plan for a synod had already been under attack by the more Orthodox leaders who feared that such a union might lead to the introduction of Reform ideas and practices. As soon as Rabbi Einhorn's radical opposition from the opposite side became generally known, the whole project died. With all his high hopes in ruins, Rabbi Wise sought out his friend, Rabbi Max Lilienthal.

"Max, you are one of my few loyal friends and helpers. Now that the bottom has fallen out of all my plans I feel as if I were left suspended in air. What is the next move?"

Touching him lightly on the shoulder, Rabbi Lilienthal said, "This is not the first time that both of us have had to face bitter opposition. Think of the ultimate goal and take courage."

"Quite so, Max, quite so. But let me tell you that this time there is something new in the situation. I am no longer concerned with the petty, bitter mysteries contrived by a Louis Spanier. This time I face a major adversary, a very able and noble man, a firebrand in the person of David Einhorn. I believe that Einhorn is the kind of man who could burn down the whole house of Israel because there might be a page in a book in the library with the contents of which he disagrees in principle. From now on the struggle will take on new dimensions." The two friends parted with a firm handclasp and the resolve to continue to fight towards their major objectives.

"Where shall I turn?" the rabbi asked Theresa. "The Conservatives attack me because, they say, I am too liberal. The liberals attack me because it seems to them I am too conservative. What, then, can I hope to do?"

Theresa sought to comfort him. When the opportunity came for travel during the summer months she urged him to embark on another journey so as to tell people of his plans and to seek their support.

On one point Theresa was very firm. "Don't attack Einhorn's reputation in the rabbinate or his power in his own community. Try rather to win him over to our side."

"All right," he agreed, "I'll go about the country looking for support. I'll try to forget about Einhorn's stab in the back and, instead, I shall present my ideas positively to all who will listen."

Once more Isaac Mayer Wise set out on railroad and by river boat and stage-coach. He went to Wheeling, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New York, and Albany. He traveled to Indianapolis, Terre Haute, and St. Louis. He visited all the towns along the Mississippi River. Wherever he went he found Jews but no Judaism. He went as far as Chicago, Milwaukee, and Detroit. Everywhere it was the same: many Jews but precious little Judaism. Everywhere he preached the idea of reform and asked the people to help him found a union of congregations, a college for the training of leaders. Perhaps in time there would even be a conference of rabbis who could meet together regularly, and in a spirit of peace and harmony help the people develop their religious life.

Most of those to whom he spoke were well impressed by

what he had to say. They became enthusiastic, but after he left, the fire he had kindled would burn down and finally go out through lack of fuel. "Perhaps I was born too soon," he thought as he sat in a railway coach that swayed from side to side. "Everyone says my plans are good, that they make sense. But no one is prepared to follow through and see that they really come to something."

Traveling about the country, Rabbi Wise sensed a new urgency in the controversy which raged between North and South. Dark clouds of war were gathering over the nation. He recalled the eight days he had spent in the gallery of the Senate when he had visited Washington in 1850. Henry Clay's eloquent voice had cried out for compromise to save the union of the states. Now extremists on both sides sought to destroy the balance. Rabbi Wise loathed the institution of slavery but he also distrusted the radical abolitionists who did not obey federal laws and who wanted to force the people of the South to change their way of life suddenly. He feared that the struggle would result in war, a civil war so terrible that it might destroy the democratic republic which he loved.

On the afternoon of April 12, 1861, Theresa was sewing at home when she heard the front door slam and the sound of running feet on the stairs. Her husband burst into the room out of breath, his hair unkempt, and his collar torn open. He clutched a special edition of the daily paper in his hand.

"Isaac," Theresa screamed, "what has happened to you?"

"To me! It hasn't happened just to me but also to you and to all of us. War has come. Major Anderson refused

to surrender Fort Sumter, and the President prepared to supply the garrison there. General Beauregard has begun a Confederate bombardment of the Fort. It is war. This is the beginning of the end."



10. THE WAR YEARS

THE STRUGGLE IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK REGARDING A JEWISH chaplain at the opening session of the State Senate had prepared Rabbi Wise for a much more important controversy which took place during the Civil War while he was rabbi in Cincinnati. Chaplains had been appointed to help meet the spiritual needs of men in the army ever since 1781. All of these chaplains had been Protestants until the time of the Civil War, when Catholic priests were recognized as military chaplains for the first time. No rabbi had ever served in this capacity although many Jewish men had fought in the armies.

Now that the efforts at compromise of national issues had failed and the terrible war between the states had

begun, thousands of Jews enlisted along with their neighbors of different backgrounds in both the Union and Confederate armies. The Jewish community soon became aware of a strange situation. While there was no law against rabbis being appointed to serve as chaplains in the Confederacy, the law of the United States held that all chaplains must be "regularly ordained minister (s) of some Christian denomination." A Congressman from Ohio wanted to substitute the words "religious society" for "Christian denomination" so as to permit the service of rabbis for men of Jewish faith in the army, but his amendment was rejected.

The first Jewish leader to grasp the full meaning of this law was Rabbi Wise. He congratulated the Congressman for his effort and attacked the law as an "unjust violation of our constitutional rights." With his customary vigor, the rabbi began a campaign of protest from his pulpit and in the editorial pages of *The Israelite*. Week after week he hammered away at the issue, holding that the appointment of any chaplains was a violation of the American principle of the separation of church and state, but that if there were to be chaplains at all, then it was obvious that rabbis should serve along with ministers and priests.

At first nothing came of the protest although one Jew, Michael Allen, had been serving as regimental chaplain in the Fifth Pennsylvania Cavalry for a regiment known as "Cameron's Dragoons" in Virginia. This regiment was commanded by a Colonel Max Friedman, a Jew. Many of the officers and twelve hundred of the men were Jewish. The choice of Michael Allen as chaplain was discovered by an eager YMCA worker who was horrified to learn that a

non-Christian was serving in that capacity. He raised a great public clamor about it, and Allen resigned.

As a naturalized American and one who believed strongly in democratic process, Rabbi Wise had studied the Constitution of the United States very carefully. He believed that one of its most important provisions was the right to petition, the right of all citizens to tell their lawmakers and leaders what they considered to be just and proper. He now determined to put that right to work. Week after week he urged his readers to send petitions about the chaplaincy problem to Washington:

Petition that body from all parts of the United States. Wherever Israelites live draw up a petition to abolish that unconstitutional law, have it signed by every representative or senator in congress. Let the petition be written by one who understands the business, have it printed and circulate it as much as possible, do not spare your time or save a few cents, it is your duty to protect your rights. This is the only way to remedy the evil; do not neglect it. . . .

When friends complained that he was making too much of the issue, the rabbi went right on devoting editorials to it. In one issue of *The Israelite* alone he reminded his readers of this item six times with the slogan: "Forget not to attend to the petition to the Congress of the United States."

The campaign started by Rabbi Wise spread throughout the country. Petitions signed by thousands of citizens, Christians as well as Jews, poured into Washington. Meanwhile,

the Board of Delegates of American Israelites appointed Arnold Fischel to serve as a civilian chaplain in the area of Washington. He presented the case for Jewish chaplains directly to President Lincoln, who wrote to him, "I shall try to have a new law broad enough to cover what is desired by you in behalf of the Israelites."

The issue was finally settled in July of 1862, when Congress voted to construe the law to mean: "That no person shall be appointed a chaplain in the United States Army that is not a regularly ordained minister of some religious denomination." This was a victory for democracy because it repudiated the notion that the United States is a Christian country and that non-Christian Americans are therefore second-class citizens. Since rabbis are regularly ordained ministers of a religious denomination, qualified Jewish religious leaders were free to serve as chaplains.

It was only a few months later that Rabbi Wise became involved in a great scandal of American history, also a result of the war. One wintry night as he was reading in the library of his house in Cincinnati he heard a horse's hoofs slip and wheels skid to a creaking stop on the ice-packed street outside. A carriage door slammed shut, and there was a knock on the storm door of the Wise home. Putting down his book the rabbi opened the door to admit a tall young man.

"I am Cesar Kaskel of Paducah, Rabbi Wise. Sorry to disturb you, but I am on my way to Washington concerning a matter of the greatest urgency regarding our people."

"Come in, Cesar, come in," Dr. Wise made him welcome. "Here, let me take your hat and coat and muffler."

Separated from his heavy trappings, Cesar Kaskel was a thin man with wavy brown hair and a trim mustache. He was in an obvious state of agitation.

"Let's go back to the library and sit down. I'll pour a little brandy, and you may tell me what is troubling you."

Seated in the warm library, young Cesar Kaskel told his story. The headquarters of the Union Army for the Department of the Tennessee was in Holly Springs, Mississippi. From there Major-General Ulysses S. Grant had issued General Order No. 11, stating:

The Jews, as a class violating every regulation of trade established by the Treasury Department and also departmental orders, are hereby expelled from the department within twenty-four hours from the receipt of this order.

"This means that all Jews have been rounded up and driven out of Holly Springs and Oxford in Mississippi as well as from my home in Paducah and elsewhere."

Rabbi Wise grew pale with horror and amazement.

"This is the most terrible thing I have ever heard. Here in America, to expel Jews as if we lived in some medieval ghetto."

He tore a sheet of paper from a pad on the library table and began writing in great haste.

"Here, Cesar, take this with you to Washington. Present it to Senator Gurley of Ohio. He will help you get to the President. I shall sound the alarm here and follow you to the capital with Rabbi Lilienthal and some of our leaders. Waste no time. Surely Abraham Lincoln will not fail to

act in such a plain case of un-American prejudice. Charles A. Dana wrote to the Secretary of War recently telling him that 'Every colonel, captain or quartermaster is in secret partnership with some operator in cotton; every soldier dreams of adding a bale of cotton to his monthly pay.' Jews indeed! If there are Jewish traders who violate the law, let them be punished along with non-Jewish traders who do the same thing. But to drive all the Jews from their homes in the department . . . and what of the Jewish soldiers in Grant's own army . . . but why talk about it? Go, Cesar. I shall see you in Washington."

In the capital, Senator Gurley read the note from Rabbi Wise, spoke to Cesar Kaskel, and took him to see the President. Mr. Lincoln had not been aware of what had happened. The following exchange took place:

THE PRESIDENT: And so the children of Israel were driven from the happy land of Canaan?

CESAR KASKEL: Yes, and that is why we have come unto Father Abraham's bosom, asking protection.

THE PRESIDENT: And this protection they shall have at once.

True to his word, President Lincoln wrote at once to General-in-Chief of the Army, Henry W. Halleck, requesting that he wire General Grant to cancel the order. Taking his leave of the President, Cesar Kaskel went to General Halleck, who wired General Grant, saying in part, "If such an order has been issued, it will be immediately revoked."

Rabbis Wise and Lilienthal then arrived in Washington along with a delegation of friends from Cincinnati, Louisville, and Baltimore. They were received by President

Lincoln and thanked him for his prompt action in having the unjust order revoked.

Turning to Dr. Wise, the President said, "To condemn a class is, to say the least, to wrong the good with the bad. I do not like to hear a class or nationality condemned on account of a few sinners."

Their mission accomplished, the visitors left after a half-hour's friendly visit. But Rabbi Wise was bitterly disappointed that the House and Senate did not pass resolutions against the kind of prejudice which had been manifested in General Order No. 11. He also took sorrowful note of the fact that General Grant, himself, did not issue any apology or give any indication that he was aware of the harm that would have been caused by such an order, not only against the Jews, but against the whole idea of American freedom and equality before the law, if it had not been speedily revoked.

In recognition of his many public services, the State Convention of the Democratic Party of Ohio nominated Dr. Wise for the office of State Senator. This happened shortly after the controversies about chaplains in the army and General Grant's infamous Order No. 11. Rabbi Wise was so well known throughout the state that he was nominated on the first ballot, even though the Convention was held on the Sabbath and he was not present. The election of 1863 was a crucial one in Ohio. Rabbi Wise would like to have accepted the nomination, but he had not consulted the members of the Board of Trustees of his congregation, most of whom were Republicans. Fearful that his participation in the election would attract votes to the Democratic

party, they asked the rabbi to decline the nomination. They asked this of him on the grounds that his presence was needed at services in the synagogue and in the classroom in the religious school. Faced by the necessity of deciding between an active political role and his tasks as rabbi, he declined the nomination, stating, "God will save the Union and the Constitution; liberty and justice for all, without my active cooperation, being, after all, without any political aspirations—only a humble individual. . . ."

The tide of war surged back and forth but it gradually became clear that superior numbers and material resources would result in victory for the Union forces. The moral issues of the war were debated everywhere. Rabbi Einhorn attacked Rabbi Wise as being "soft to the Confederacy." The Baltimore rabbi was an outspoken abolitionist who abhorred slavery as morally wrong. For him no sacrifice was too great to be expended for the abolition of the hated institution. Threatened by a pro-southern mob in Baltimore, Rabbi Einhorn had to flee to Philadelphia, from where he continued his attacks on the moderate position of Rabbi Wise, both with respect to reforming Judaism and the issues of the war.

"Perhaps he is right, Isaac," Theresa ventured to say as they discussed an editorial in *Sinai*. "You, yourself, detest slavery. Why have you never become an abolitionist?"

"I know he is right in his purpose. It is the method which I cannot follow. Look, Theresa, why are the most politically ambitious scoundrels abolitionists? Why do the almost illiterate fundamentalist preachers agree with them? That movement is a political game which led to war. Granted that there are honest and high-minded men among them,

surely they are keeping poor company and are being used. We could have settled the slavery issue gradually, without these years of terrible civil war. What I want to work for is a united America with peace and justice for all, including the Negroes and white people of the South."

It was impossible to combat Einhorn in polite terms. The eastern leader continued to taunt Rabbi Wise about his moderate position, both with regard to the re-formation of Judaism and his political viewpoint. Dr. Wise replied in *The Israelite*, calling Einhorn a deist in religion and a radical in politics. "The Berlin pattern means no religion," he wrote. "It is the deformation of Judaism rather than its reformation which you want. Einhorn, you should not have forgotten that your father was a Jew!"

What he believed to be true Rabbi Wise expressed fearlessly. His editorials advocating forgiveness and peace, while he opposed the possibility of reopening traffic in slaves, resulted in many cancellations from *The Israelite* subscribers. The financial situation of the paper grew steadily worse, but the editor persisted in his policy.

Rabbi Wise also used *The Israelite* as a means of publishing lists of the names of prisoners in both Union and Confederate military prisons. He urged his remaining readers in both areas to go to the prisons and help the victims of the war. Many boys who suffered in prisons on both sides received food and other help because subscribers had learned of their plight by reading about them in *The Israelite*.

At the end of the war Rabbi Wise sought to help those who were in need and advocated a lenient policy towards those who had seceded. This he did in the hope of healing old wounds and building a better future for the country.



11. CHURCH AND STATE

No honest man can or will sacrifice his convictions to any . . . human institution. . . . There is a law higher than all made by man. . . . If my government enact laws; . . . contrary to conviction, I am an Israelite first and would treat my country as being in a state of rebellion against me. . . . I am a loyal citizen because it does not prevent my being an Israelite according to my conviction. . . . Therefore, first my God and then my country is as good a motto as any.

All his life Rabbi Wise opposed attempts to unite the church and the state. He resisted all efforts to force the teaching of religion in the public schools. He spoke and

wrote against Bible reading and other religious observances in the public schools. Since his whole life was spent in the service of God and he wrote a book about the Bible to defend its sacred text from what he considered the too radical criticism of modern scholars, it is plain that he opposed religious teaching and Bible reading in the schools because he felt this was not the proper place for such activities. As early as 1855, Rabbi Wise wrote about this issue in *The Israelite*. He never tired of telling the people, "We all pay taxes to support the public schools. We should all send our children to these schools for their general education. The place for religious instruction and prayer and Bible readings is the home, and after the home, the church and the synagogue. Those who support the schools by their taxes are all of us: Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and many others, including those of no religious faith. The full rights of all should be protected in the American public schools."

There were many who did not agree with this position. One day, early in September of 1869, Rabbi Wise received a message from his friend, the Reverend Thomas Vickers of the First Unitarian Church in Cincinnati. In the message, his friend asked that the rabbi drop in at his study as soon as possible to discuss an urgent matter. Rabbi Wise went at once, entered through the side door of the church, and found Mr. Vickers in his study, standing behind a high desk upon which he had been writing. The tall, lean man strode towards his visitor, his keen blue eyes smiling a welcome as he grasped his hand firmly.

"Welcome, Isaac! I am glad you could come so soon. Sit down. The matter I want to discuss will interest you."

The rabbi sat back in an armchair, grasped the head of his walking-stick, and looked quizzically at his friend, now seated opposite him in the small study. "Does it have something to do with the School Board?"

The Reverend Vickers smiled in turn. "Isaac, you may not be a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but you do have a nose for news."

"Why, Tom, I didn't expect you of all people to believe that nonsense about Jewish noses. Jewish noses are no longer than other peoples' noses. It is true, however, that some Jews cannot seem to see beyond the end of their quite normal noses. Perhaps this might be the case with some Hebrew members of your Board of Education?"

"It might be the case with one of them. I don't know yet. But confound your noses; let's talk about your Moses. It is the equal status of what some call Mosaic faith that is at stake in the business at hand, and it's no laughing matter."

"Go ahead, Tom. I was just trying to clear the atmosphere and teach a little anthropology at the same time. Let's hear your story."

The Reverend Vickers went on to tell his friend about the probable order of business for the next Board meeting, scheduled for the sixth of the month. It was the custom to have daily reading from the King James version of the Bible in the Cincinnati public schools. Many members of the Board, including Mr. Vickers, opposed this because any translation of the Bible was sectarian; the Jews did not consider the New Testament as part of the Bible, and many other citizens wanted no Bible reading at all.

"I agree, Tom," the rabbi broke in. "As soon as you read

the Bible, you have to ask, 'Which Bible?' I'll warrant it isn't the Hebrew original that is read in the schools which I help support. Nor is it the Douay, used by our Catholic neighbors. The very fact that we must in honesty ask, 'Which Bible?' clearly implies that we should read none at all in public schools."

"Don't preach to me, Isaac. I don't need it. As a Unitarian I am not interested in having my children indoctrinated religiously in the public schools any more than you are. But let me get on with the news. At the next meeting a motion will be made to dispense with Bible reading in the city schools. I believe a majority of the Board will vote for it. What do you think of that?"

"Well, you know what I think about it. I am strongly for it. I hope it will pass, and I shall speak to everyone I know in praise of the Board's liberal position if it does pass. But, since you think I can predict the future, let me add that I believe we shall have a long, tough fight before this issue is settled."

"No argument there, Isaac," Mr. Vickers laughed. The two friends talked for a while longer, then Rabbi Wise took his leave. He walked home thoughtfully, turning over in his mind the possible repercussions of seeking to free the school children of religious indoctrination at public expense.

Just as the Reverend Mr. Vickers had said, the motion to stop Bible reading in the public schools was made on September sixth. Immediately a storm of protest broke out, mass meetings were held, and large numbers of angry people attended school Board meetings. The members of the Board nevertheless held to their course and on November first

the resolution passed by a vote of twenty-three to fifteen. A group of Protestants immediately filed suit in Superior Court for an order to restrain the Board from carrying out the decision.

The case was tried before three judges. All of the arguments on both sides were stated and the Court, by a vote of two to one, upheld the minority of the Board of Education who wanted the Bible read in the schools. Mr. Vickers and Rabbi Wise were very disappointed at the result, but they kept on speaking against Bible reading in the schools. They took heart from the plain-spoken words of the third judge, Alphonso Taft (father of the future president), who delivered the dissenting opinion. Among other things, Judge Taft had said:

It is in vain to attempt to escape the force of the clauses of the Bill of Rights by assuming that the Protestant Christian religion was intended in the Bill of Rights, and that the sects of Protestant Christians *only* were, therefore, entitled to protection. Between all forms of religious belief the State knows no difference, provided they do not transgress its civil regulations. . . .

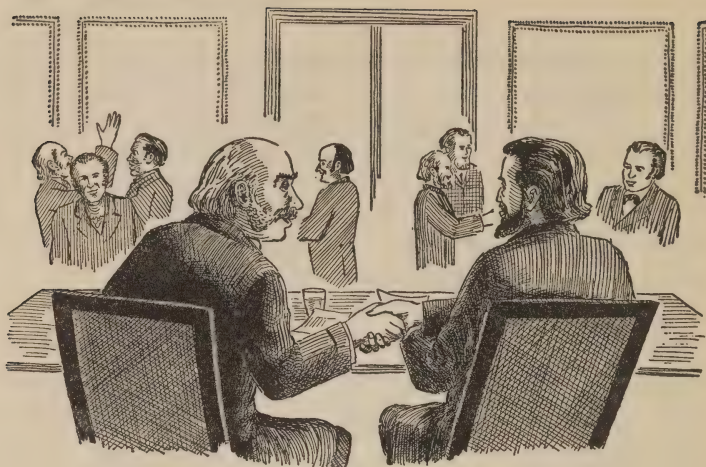
No sect can, because it includes a majority of a community or a majority of the citizens of the State, claim any preference whatever. It can not claim that its mode of worship or its religion shall prevail in the common schools. . . .

The State protects every religious denomination in the quiet enjoyment of its own mode of worship. . . .

When the Board of Education, therefore, which represents the civil power of the State in the schools, finds objection made to the use of the Protestant Bible and Protestant singing of Protestant hymns, on conscientious grounds, and concludes to dispense with the practice in the schools, it is no just ground to charge on the Board hostility to the Bible, or to the Protestant religion, or to religion in general. The Bible is not banished, nor is religion degraded or abused. The Board have simply aimed to free the common schools from any just conscientious objections, by confining them to secular instruction, and moral and intellectual training.

"If we take these words to the Supreme Court of the State," the rabbi said, "surely reason will prevail over passion. The situation is so clear that I believe the cause to be won."

The Reverend Mr. Vickers and Rabbi Wise were right in assuming the cause could be won. The Supreme Court of Ohio unanimously upheld the opinion of Judge Taft. In their ruling in 1873 they stated that the Board of Education was perfectly free to prohibit Bible reading in the public schools. The five justices concurred in saying that the state of Ohio and the United States of America were not Christian and they pointed out that the free exercise of *religion* was protected by American laws and that no one could be compelled to practice any particular religion. They said, "True Christianity asks no aid from the sword of civil authority. . . . A form of religion that cannot live under equal and impartial laws ought to die, and sooner or later must die."



12. BUILDING A UNION OF CONGREGATIONS

AS CONGREGATION B'NAI YESHURUN GREW, IT HAD BEEN DECIDED that a new synagogue building should be erected. Land was secured at the corner of Plum and Eighth Streets and the work was begun. The result was a magnificent temple, Moorish in style, with a high center section flanked by two lower sections, one on each side. Twin spires rose from the central part of the building. The whole was built of stone with fine stained-glass windows. Within, it was richly paneled with dark wood, illumined by the light from many tall tapers and beautiful gas fixtures. The height of the vaulted ceiling lifted the spirits of those who entered, while the warmth and color of the walls and windows warmed

their hearts. The temple was dedicated on August 24, 1866.

Speaking before a huge congregation, Dr. Wise said, "It is time that Judaism welcome the light of day and deck itself with becoming pride." Then, pointing to the great dome of the temple, he continued, "It is my hope that the young people who are here today will recall the labors of their fathers who built this house dedicated to the service of God and that they will turn their gaze towards heaven with equal piety."

As Theresa sat in her pew in the beautiful temple, listening to her husband's sermon of dedication, her heart swelled with pride and love. At the same time she felt terribly tired. The years of struggle had left their mark and there were days when she felt weary and ill. "As Isaac says," she meditated, "I pray that the children will turn to God as their fathers have done. If I do not live to see our children all grown up, I pray God to help Isaac care for them. . . ."

The Wise family grew. In all, ten children were born, of whom two died. Four boys and four girls grew up. Such a large family needed plenty of room. Rabbi Wise solved this problem by buying a farm on the Hamilton Turnpike two miles north of the village of College Hill. There were two schools nearby: Ohio Female College and Farmer's College, so the boys and girls could go to school near home while Dr. Wise drove back and forth over the nine miles of road to Cincinnati in his buggy.

After school on week-days the rabbi would leave the temple with an armful of books, a cigar, and a box of matches. On the way home he would light the cigar and then let it go out as he thought about his plans, while the horse

jogged slowly along the turnpike. He would arrive home with the cigar almost intact and all the matches used up. On Sunday a large group of friends would make the trip out to College Hill to visit with the rabbi, Theresa, and the children.

Four years after the dedication of the new temple Theresa became very ill. Rabbi Wise was greatly distressed. He had always confided in his wife. He felt that the real joy of achievement did not lay in public acclaim but in the quiet approval of the dear one with whom he had shared so many defeats and triumphs. He took her to the best doctors and did everything they suggested to make her comfortable and to seek a cure for her sickness. Gradually, Theresa became an invalid and for several years could not go about her usual daily tasks. Each night Rabbi Wise would come to her room, tell her of the day's events, read to her, and stroke her dear hand, now grown pale and thin.

Even his worry about Theresa's illness could not free Rabbi Wise from his duties as rabbi, teacher, and editor. He persisted in his plans for a religious organization of Jewish life on a national scale. These plans did not always meet with the approval of his friends and supporters within the congregation.

"What do you expect to gain by pounding home the same ideas week after week? Rabbi, you complain that *The Israelite* has too few subscribers. Did it ever occur to you that your readers grow tired and discouraged when you keep on proposing the same plans, plans which so far have not come to any practical conclusion?"

Dr. Wise looked at his friend, Marcus Fechheimer. The

two men were in the rabbi's study at the Plum Street Temple. It was a Sabbath afternoon in 1871. Mr. Fechheimer held a copy of *The Israelite* in his hand.

"You are right in a way, my friend," the rabbi answered. "I began this campaign in Albany way back in 1848. I suppose I am a poor organizer. You ask why I continue to try. Marcus, there is only one answer. It is a matter of conscience, or duty. The record is in the files of that paper you hold in your hand.

"Remember the Cleveland meeting of 1855? We almost won out there. The union might have been built right then and there, but Einhorn and his friends in the East attacked me because I was willing to compromise even the least bit. Then the Orthodox turned the plan down because they feared it might lead to too much reform. Caught in the middle, we could not carry through our plan.

"I persist in my idea because I know that if we cannot form a union of congregations capable of supporting a college, our temples will be desolate in the near future."

Rabbi Wise pushed his glasses up on his forehead, rested his chin in his right hand, elbow propped on the arm of his chair, and stared into space for a moment. Focusing his look on his friend again, he continued, "And there is more involved than just a college for higher Jewish learning, although I believe that should be the first order of business. Consider the condition of our religious schools. A sound union of congregations could undertake projects in Jewish education which no one congregation alone could possibly support. I can envision the day when we shall be able to produce attractively printed histories and story books, texts

suited to the age and interests of the children in our religious schools. Rabbis like to deal with matters of principle but the laymen who would lead such a confederation of synagogues would be able to work out detailed guides for our congregations with respect to the new forms that many synagogue activities already begin to take. As matters stand now," he raised his head and brought his closed fist down on the desk for emphasis, "a family joins a temple and there is usually very little effort made to draw out the participation of each member of the family group. I can imagine a whole plan of temple organization carried forward and sustained by such a union of congregations in which special provision would be made for the creative efforts of women, men, and young people beyond the religious school age. There is no limit to the future possibilities of the union of congregations."

"I know how you feel, Rabbi. But what do you plan to do now? You must admit that so far very little has been accomplished."

Dr. Wise nodded. "But it takes time for large plans to filter down to the people. That is the value of my weekly pounding, as you call it, in *The Israelite*. Now, as you know, Mr. Henry Adler of Lawrenceburg, Indiana, has contributed ten thousand dollars to this congregation to be used towards establishing a theological college. We must not start another school until we have the popular support necessary to make sure that it will succeed."

The rabbi arose from his chair and began pacing up and down the study. "You know, Marcus, I think I have a new idea. Rabbi Einhorn and his radical reformers in the East will not join with us, not now. They know that I stand for

the use of Hebrew, the observance of the Sabbath, for a position of moderate, constructive reform. The Orthodox won't join us, certainly not now. They know that I apply the ideas of Jewish law to effect reforms in Jewish religious practice.

"Still, I know from the many thousands of people whom I have met and with whom I have spoken that we have a broad democratic base of support for our ideas in the American Jewish community. Perhaps the trouble is that we have tried to do too much too fast. Why not call a conference of congregational delegates from the north, west, and south of the country? If they were to succeed in starting a federation of congregations, some of the others might come in later on. What do you think?"

Marcus Fechheimer thought the idea sound. So did Mr. Loth, now president of B'nai Yeshurun. In April, 1871, Rabbis Wise and Lilienthal joined with others in calling a conference attended by nineteen colleagues. They debated the issue of the projected union and provided that a founding convention should be held as soon as twenty congregations representing at least two thousand members appointed delegates. The result of this meeting was the same as that which had followed the earlier ones. The radical rabbis of New York and Philadelphia, led by Rabbi David Einhorn, attacked the conference bitterly.

Nothing daunted Rabbi Wise in this effort, although the sorrow of Theresa's illness now hung heavily on him. He kept on with his hammer strokes in *The Israelite* and from his own pulpit. In March, 1873, all the Cincinnati congregations came together and elected delegates to prepare a call for a general convention.

The excitement grew more and more keen as the Cincinnati committee issued a call to all congregations in the South and West to meet in their city on July eighth to form a union of congregations. Rabbi Wise told the people through *The Israelite*, "Now the question will be decided. Are we ripe for great work, or are we to remain minors a little while longer until we can pick up courage enough to go and do that which should be done, that which is our duty before God and man? Our confidence is unshaken. We hope. We wait impatiently, because we know on the eighth of July Judaism can open a new era of its history in America, or declare its incompetency, to be dragged along many a year to come."

July 8, 1873 finally came. Delegates from thirty-four congregations took part in the meeting. There was no argument with the Orthodox or the more radical reformers because neither party attended. Rabbi David Einhorn organized a boycott against the meeting. In unity for the first time the congregations formed the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and decided: "to establish, sustain and govern a seat of learning for Israel's religion . . . to provide means for the relief of Jews from political oppression and unjust discrimination . . . to promote religious instruction and encourage the study of the Scriptures and of the tenets and history of Judaism."

The foes in the East responded as expected. They called the new movement "commonplace . . . a farce"; they said that Rabbi Wise was trying to become the "Jewish Archbishop of American Israel"; they dubbed the projected college the "Wise College."

In spite of all the efforts of physicians and loving care given by her family and friends, Theresa grew steadily weaker. One night, as Rabbi Wise sat by her bedside, gently stroking her hand, she opened her eyes and spoke to him in a whisper. "Isaac," she breathed, "I want to tell you something. I do not think I shall be able to stay with you much longer. You . . . will care for the children. What I want to say . . . and you will understand me, I know, is that . . . Isaac, I'm so glad for you, and I'm happy we didn't stay in Radnitz . . . or go . . . to France."

"Please rest, my dear, my beloved. I do understand what you mean. And you know that I am happy, too." He clasped her hand and tried to stem his tears as Theresa fell asleep.

Theresa died in the year 1874. Rabbi Wise missed her desperately. He worked even harder than before and found that his work helped him to withstand his grief. He preached sermons on philosophy and religion, gathered them together into a book called, *The Cosmic God*, published it on his own presses, and dedicated the book in loving memory of Theresa.

Now that the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been established, Rabbi Einhorn and his followers in the East called their own congregational conference in 1876. It was attended by representatives of the best-known congregations in New York as well as the radical reform group in Chicago. Remembering Theresa's advice about winning his opponent over instead of seeking to destroy him, Rabbi Wise saw a true victory for his idea in the new enterprise started by Einhorn. Instead of attacking it as imitative and competitive, he wished the new organization "the best of success."

One day, a distinguished visitor came to the rabbi's study at Plum Street. It was Mr. Simon Wolf of Washington, a famous lawyer, and one who had often championed the cause of Jewish people at home and abroad. "Dr. Wise," he began in a formal manner, "I have a plan for uniting the two federations of congregations into one."

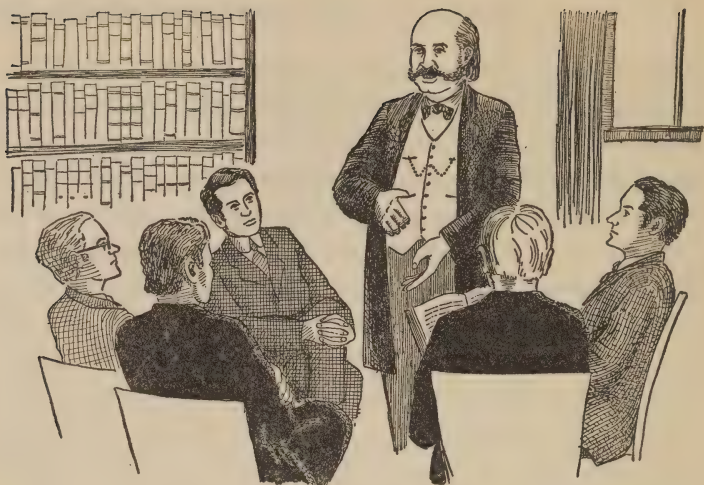
"Very good. Let's hear your plan. I have tried to do just that for many years. Now that we have finally succeeded here in the West and have even been paid the compliment of being imitated by our friends in the East, I have been too busy with practical plans to attend to healing the breach. How do you suggest we do it?"

"Look, the Union as it now stands represents the South and the West. Rabbi Einhorn and his friends have a similar group in the East which, oddly enough, includes Temple Sinai in Chicago. I suggest that the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations should consist of thirty members, fifteen to be residents of the western and southern states, and fifteen of the East."

"This sounds most reasonable and agreeable to me, Mr. Wolf. I shall press for its adoption here if you will do the same in the East." They shook hands and parted. Each did as he had promised and the breach was healed.

By April, 1878, there were over one hundred congregations in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. Eastern resistance finally came to an end when Rabbi Einhorn's congregation, Temple Beth-El of New York, joined with the others. Returning from a meeting in Milwaukee in 1878, Dr. Wise could report that all Reform congregations were finally united. The foundation was thus laid for the begin-

ning of a new era in American Jewish life. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations under the leadership of Moritz Loth, president of Temple B'nai Yeshurun, continued to support the College, prepare texts and other materials for religious schools and work for the welfare of all Jews. As time passed the Union became the central agency for stimulating religious life among the congregations throughout the entire country.



13. THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE

THE HORSES SLOWED FROM A TROT TO A WALK AS THE DRIVER turned them around the corner and reined in before the general store in College Hill. The store was closed because it was Sunday, a hot Indian summer kind of Sunday in September, 1875. "Easy there, my boy," the driver said to David, as he clambered down the steps at the back of the bus. Young David Philipson stood in a cloud of dust kicked up by the horses and the wheels of the omnibus as the stage moved down the road. Although the store was closed, there were two sleepy-looking men sitting on the porch, their chairs tilted back against the wall. Clutching his carpet bag in one hand, David approached them.

"Sir, could you tell me how to find Floral House Farm?"

"Why, yes," one of the men said as he shifted his weight and brought his chair down on its four legs, "you must be looking for Dr. Wise. Go to the corner here, turn right, walk for a while, then you'll see the farmhouse."

"How far is it?"

"I reckon it's about two miles."

David thanked the man and set off down the dusty road. After he had walked north about a mile, he saw some fields that had been planted with potatoes and melons. Farther along he came upon a narrow lane that turned up to the left. Here he had his first view of the farm where Isaac Mayer Wise enjoyed living as an amateur farmer.

David walked up the steps and knocked on the door. A maid answered and led David into the parlor. He had barely begun to look at the knickknacks when Rabbi Wise walked in. Although his hair was streaked with grey and he was heavier now than in the early days, he greeted David with a genial, youthful smile. "Welcome, David. How did you leave the family? Come into the dining-room and join us. We were just about to begin our Sunday dinner."

Dr. Wise made David feel at home as he put his arm about the boy's shoulder and led him to the dining-room. There he saw eight people sitting about a long table. They ranged all the way from Emily, a mature young woman, to Effie, a girl about David's age, and Harry, the youngest.

"Children," Rabbi Wise said, as he signaled the maid to set an extra place for David, "I want you all to meet David Philipson. David has come from Columbus to enter the first class at the Hebrew Union College."

When the introductions were over and Rabbi Wise had

spoken the prayer over bread . . . "Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Thou who bringest forth bread from the earth" . . . David fell to with a good appetite. "Why do you want to be a rabbi?" Effie asked, her dark eyes puzzled. "I . . . I'm not sure. Maybe it's because I want to be like your father, like Dr. Wise. Ever since he used to visit us in Wabash, and lately in Columbus, I've felt that way."

"Now, Effie," Rabbi Wise said, "David will have plenty of time during the next eight years to decide exactly what he wants to do, and why. Tomorrow I shall take him to the city, help him find a place to live, and introduce him to the other boys. Meanwhile, let's enjoy this fine afternoon together. Here it is late in September, but it's just like summer outside."

After dinner the younger children took David to explore the farm while Rabbi Wise sat on the porch, smoked his cigar, and talked to Emily and the others. "It's hard to be both father and mother," the rabbi said, "but we must do the best we can. It is good that we have the farm and that we are near both Ohio Female College and Farmer's College so that all of you will receive good educations. What is most distressing is to watch the younger ones, especially Effie and Harry, who must now grow up without a mother's care."

"Father," Emily looked hurt, "please stop worrying about them. You know we shall help out all we can. You have enough to think about since you are still rabbi at Plum Street, editor of the paper, founder of the Union, and now president of the College, as well as unofficial ambassador representing the Jews in the city and throughout the country. Your mind must be free of worry or you will ruin your health, and then where shall we be?"

"You are right, Emily," her father smiled, "and who would have expected such wisdom from you when you rode across the border from Bohemia in your mother's arms. That's how it goes. Now you and your brothers are quite capable of managing the house and me as well. Still, it is difficult without wife and mother."

The next day Rabbi Wise took David in the buggy to Cincinnati. Here he met the other students and Professor Solomon Eppinger. Seventeen boys were present when the Hebrew Union College opened its doors on October 3, 1875. Since the College had no building of its own, the classes met in the vestry rooms of the Mound Street Temple at the corner of Eighth and Mound. Rabbi Wise and Professor Eppinger were the only teachers at first although Rabbi Max Lilienthal joined the faculty the second year. Rabbi Moses Mielziner, a famous student of the Talmud, also became a teacher at the College two years later.

Since new students came to the college each year, the classes were soon too large for the small rooms made available by local congregations. In the spring of 1881 a large double house with a stone front on West Sixth Street was purchased and dedicated as a home for the College.

At the time of the dedication David Philipson was in his sixth year at the College. He joined with all the students and many leaders of the Jewish community as well as the officials of the city of Cincinnati on the great occasion. The crowd assembled in the chapel of the College.

After the service of dedication, Dr. Wise spoke to the students in words which David never forgot, "This is the first time in the history of our country that any house has

been dedicated as this to higher Jewish learning . . . by communication from teacher to students."

As Rabbi Wise went on, David thought to himself, "It is a wonderful thing to see a man who has struggled for a great plan live to take part in its realization. We must carry the message of our College, the message of our faith, to the whole country in the years to come."

Among those who came for the dedication of the new building was Dr. Joseph Lewi, the old friend of Rabbi Wise from Radnitz and Albany. After the service was over the two men walked back to the house together. Seated in the library, Dr. Lewi spoke with some hesitation, feeling his way, "Isaac, do you remember that night long ago in Radnitz when I said I was concerned for your future? I'm not sure I know why but I have the same feeling tonight. Of course, these young men welcome a new building in a new land to house the school of the new Judaism. But, Isaac, do they understand that the life of the new Judaism is the life of all Judaism, ancient or modern, Orthodox or Reform?"

"Yes, Joseph, Einhorn's influence has left a mark. But here, as before, I have anticipated you, at least in the sense that I am aware of the kind of problem I face."

"I wonder if you are, Isaac. We survived the plots of Louis Spanier in the old days. You have come a long way since then and you defeated a much stronger adversary in David Einhorn. But now that you are becoming successful you face the much greater task of establishing your life in authentic Judaism. Will these young men know enough, will they feel deeply enough to carry on the tradition? Or will they tend to mistake the external trappings for the inner core?"

Dr. Wise looked thoughtfully at his friend. "You have touched on the real problem before us. I can only live in the faith that I shall win out ultimately. The future will witness to the foundations upon which I am building. Shall we turn in? I must be back at the College in the morning."

The students at the College were very busy young men. It was a rule of the school that no one could be ordained as a rabbi until after he had graduated from an approved university. Since most of the boys were too young to have done this yet, they went to high school and later on to the University at the same time that they carried on their rabbinical studies. At the College they learned about the Bible; the great collection of later laws, legends, and moral teachings called the *Talmud*; and about Jewish history. Above all, they studied the Hebrew language so that they could understand the Bible and the other books in the very words in which they had been written down. They learned practical things too, like how to write and deliver sermons, and how to manage religious schools for the instruction of children.

In spite of the hard work the students at the College managed to find time for fun. They organized picnics at the city's parks and went for excursions on river boats. Families in Cincinnati would invite them to their homes for special occasions like Thanksgiving dinner, and they would be guests of Dr. Wise for the Seder on the eve of Passover.

Rabbi Wise was the kind of teacher whom the students liked to please. They knew he was their friend because most of them would not have had enough money to pay all their bills, nor could they have endured the long, hard grind away from home and friends had it not been for his help and

kindliness. There was no tuition fee at the College, but it still cost a great deal for a boy to study for eight years, far from his own home. Dr. Wise could always be counted on for help when it was needed. He spent a great deal of his time raising funds for the College, a portion of which was made available to help the students. Because of the close friendships which grew up between him and his students, much of what they learned was gathered outside of the classroom.

When classes were not in session, it was a common sight on Sixth Street between Cutter and Mound to see Rabbi Wise walking up and down the street followed by a group of students, all of them lost in excited conversation about the pros and cons of some point that had come up in class.

One Saturday morning something happened which none of them ever forgot. Just as the rabbi was about to begin his sermon a man rushed down the aisle and handed him a slip of paper. He adjusted his spectacles, which he often pushed up high on his forehead when he was not reading, and learned that a large number of immigrants had just come to the city where they were stranded at a railway station because no one had made provision for them.

Roused to anger, Rabbi Wise put his prepared sermon out of his mind and spoke instead of the need of these people and the disgrace of the community in not having arranged to meet them. "Here they have fled from persecution far across the world. They come to our city on the Sabbath, poor, friendless, and broken in spirit. We do not help them. We have not even prepared to meet them. Instead, we come here to the synagogue and pray to God while His children need immediate assistance.

"Here, Israel," he called to one of the students, "go into my study and bring me my hat."

The boy hurried to the study and returned carrying Dr. Wise's high hat, the one he always wore on Sabbaths and festivals. Taking the hat, the rabbi ended his sermon by emptying his pockets and his wallet into it. He then sent Israel through the congregation with the hat, and a large sum of money was raised then and there. When the service was over, Rabbi Wise hurried to the depot with a committee from the congregation. They provided for the needs of the newcomers.

At last the great day came, the day when the members of the first graduating class of the Hebrew Union College would receive their ordination as rabbis in Israel. The ceremony was planned for a July evening in 1883, and was to be held in the beautiful Plum Street Temple. The temple was decorated with flowers. The sanctuary filled with a great congregation as the notes of the organ prelude sounded forth the call to worship. Ten years had passed since the founding of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, eight since the Hebrew Union College had opened its doors. The original class of seventeen had gradually been reduced to four as the students grew older and came to understand what was involved in becoming rabbis. These four now sat on the pulpit, two on each side of the Ark containing the scrolls of the Torah. There they were, young men now, the four who had survived the eight years of study and life together: Israel Aaron, Henry Berkowitz, Joseph Krauskopf, and David Philipson.

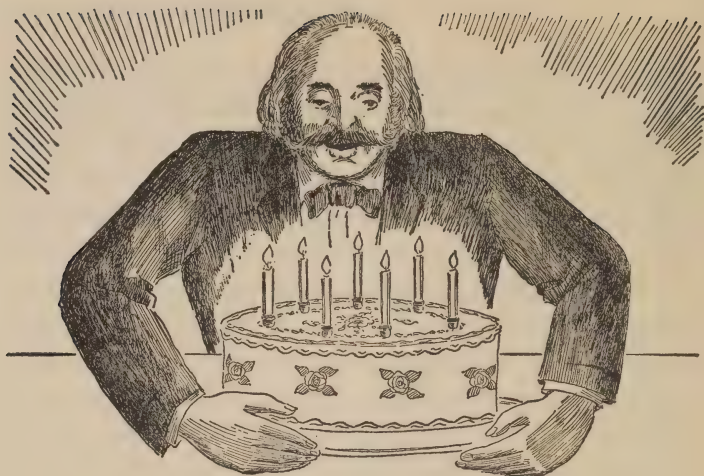
When the evening service was completed, Rabbi Wise

opened the Ark, stood before it, and beckoned the four to stand before him. Referring to the scrolls in the Ark, he said, "Judaism in its entirety, in its completion and perfection, is in this very Torah, and in that only. A faithful Israelite is he whose belief and life are regulated by the Torah to the best of his understanding. . . . There is no Judaism without the Torah and Revelation. This College was established to teach the literature of Israel; to train, educate, and license rabbis for real Judaism. During your eight years at the College you have proved yourselves to be worthy men and able students. I am therefore happy to ordain you now as rabbis in Israel through authority vested in me by the Board of Governors of this institution."

Rabbi Wise went to each one of the four graduating students individually, placed his hands upon the student's head, invoked God's blessing upon him, and kissed the forehead of each. As he felt the hands of his teacher and master in Judaism touch his forehead, and heard the dear voice repeat the ancient blessing, "May the Lord bless thee and keep thee," David thought back to the day he had first walked along the road to Floral House. His eyes blurred and his breath came quickly as he silently vowed to live equal to the trust which was now his.

Following the service of ordination, many people, some of whom had been among his bitter opponents, were eager to shake hands with Dr. Wise and to congratulate him on the important occasion of the first graduation from the College. "It is a fine affair," he agreed, "but now we must wait to see how these young colleagues function as rabbis. In any case, the work has just begun."

Rabbi Wise married again during the early years of the College. His second wife was Selma Bondi, the daughter of a learned colleague. Four children were born of this marriage. One of them, Jonah B. Wise, decided to become a rabbi and entered the College which his father had founded.



14. THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

"YES, MY DEAR FRIENDS, IT IS TRUE. SEVENTY YEARS AGO, ON THIS very same date, the twenty-ninth of March, a great event took place in the small town of Steingrub, Bohemia." Dr. Wise stopped for effect. He touched his glasses lightly to make sure they were perched in the usual place up on his forehead. Grey side whiskers framed his smiling face. "I . . . was . . . born."

"Hurrah!" Jonah interrupted from his place far down the long table. "Now why don't you blow out the candles so we can eat the cake?"

Rabbi Wise fingered the heavy gold watch chain across the front of his vest, his eyes twinkling. "Be patient, children, all of you. I also mean to include in this command my charm-

ing wife, Selma, the very reverend Philipson, and you, Isidor Lewi, our honored guest from Albany. You must all realize that since I am an experienced public speaker I am accustomed to saving my wind for the delivery of speeches. I am seventy years old and have given at least seventy thousand speeches. Now you expect me suddenly to waste my breath in the childish game of blowing out candles. Still, I suppose that since I am a preacher of progress, I must adjust to new conditions and new duties. There is also the practical consideration that little Isaac is still hungry. So are Jonah and Regina, to say nothing of Elsie and the rest of you. It's a good thing that Effie settled for seven candles instead of seventy. Otherwise, I would not have had enough breath for the task. Well, here we go."

Everyone watched while Rabbi Wise took a deep breath, pursed his lips, and blew along the circle of candles. They all went out and he sat down to a round of applause. Selma dipped her cake knife into a tumbler of cold water and prepared to divide the birthday treat.

After dinner, the older children began to clear the table while the youngest ones went out to enjoy the unusually pleasant day. It was one of those rare days in late March when you could smell spring in the air. Dr. Wise lit his cigar and put his hand on Isidor Lewi's arm. "My boy, it was very good of you to come. I have been your father's friend since the days of Radnitz, and all during my years in Albany I depended on him both as physician and as loyal helper in the congregation. Of course, you have long since grown beyond *The Israelite*, but I still follow your work as a journalist with the deepest interest."

"Naturally, Dr. Wise, there had to be a member of the

Lewi family present for your seventieth birthday celebration. But I must confess that the project about which you hinted in your last letter was exciting to us. I want to learn more about it. Perhaps I can help you secure a favorable press."

"Wait until I call David Philipson, Isidor. He is also in on this, and I want to take counsel with you both. David," he called to the other end of the room, "come and join Isidor and me in the study."

Comfortably seated in dark brown leather armchairs in the study, a birthday gift from the alumni of the College, David and Isidor looked inquiringly at Dr. Wise. Unperturbed, he continued puffing at his cigar, blowing smoke up towards the high ceiling of the study. David Philipson broke the silence.

"So many people have asked me about it, about whether you intend to call a conference of rabbis together, that I hope you have some news for us today."

"Five years ago, David, I wrote in *The Israelite* that since the graduates of the Hebrew Union College established an association of graduates, we already had the nucleus of a permanent rabbinical association."

"I know that you wrote that and it is true. But nothing further has been done. We are still split up, each man a law unto himself, each congregation free to deal with the rabbi as its leaders see fit. It is surely time that we have a group of rabbis who stay together for the good of our work and the future of American Judaism, especially of Reform Judaism. What we need to know now is whether you will call such a conference."

Dr. Wise looked at Isidor Lewi before answering his young colleague. "Isidor, you know from your father as well as from the accounts in *The Israelite* and in other papers what a long and troublesome history belongs to this issue. I want you both to understand my position and to help me reach the right decision.

"When I came to this country in 1846, I had great plans for the building of Reform or Liberal Judaism. Put it down to youthful enthusiasm if you will, but I really believed that I could bring all of the rabbis and the chief laymen of the congregations together in what I hoped to call a 'synod.' With the help of this group I expected to establish a college to train rabbis and to build a reasonably united religious life for our people in the United States.

"It took years for me to learn that although the rabbis are excellent and devoted men they are highly individualistic and difficult to bring into an effective organization. Look at what happened," he knocked a long, grey ash from his cigar, "it took almost thirty years to bring anyone together, and then it was the laymen in the congregations who finally agreed to form the Union, not the rabbis."

"But let's not depreciate what has been done," David Philipson broke in, "we do have the College and our association of graduates."

"Yes," Rabbi Wise answered, "but the College was created by the Union and is supported, as far as it is supported at all, by the Union, not by the rabbis. Since everything has happened in reverse order from what I expected, perhaps you are right in thinking that now, now when we already have the Union and the College, is the time to try to create

a conference of American rabbis. Perhaps. But, personally, I shall not issue the call for such a meeting."

Rabbi Philipson and Isidor Lewi chorused, "Why not?"

"Because, as you know, there have been several efforts made in this direction. The latest was the meeting in Pittsburgh in 1885, only four years ago. Kaufmann Kohler called that gathering. I knew it would represent the extreme viewpoint that is popular in the East. Still, I went along with them, partly because I believe in unity and harmony. If we can't bring the Orthodox and Reform elements together, it is at least better to have unity among the reformers than none at all. Besides, I assumed, and I think I was right, that if I went along with the Pittsburgh Conference, more individuals and groups would be likely to support the Union and the College."

David Philipson spoke up, "But, Dr. Wise, there has been no meeting of rabbis in four years. Aside from its declaration of principles, the Pittsburgh Conference has left us nothing. I admire what was done there, especially the part about helping to end poverty in the midst of plenty, and to eliminate persecution and mistreatment, not only of Jews, but of all races, nations, and religious groups. It was good to remind us of the broad, universal message of our faith. But men can't live by principles alone, and I say the time is ripe for a regular conference of rabbis to meet each year and to deal with all our problems as American Jews."

"Well spoken, David," Isidor Lewi said, "I agree with you. From the layman's viewpoint I am sure that the cause of Reform Judaism would be furthered by the founding of a rabbinical conference."

Dr. Wise crushed out his cigar and sat hunched over the desk for a moment of silence. Then, leaning back in his chair, he replied, "But you must see that I am committed to the former conference and cannot very well issue the call for a new one now. However," at this point he spoke slowly as if to emphasize his words, "the next Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations will meet in Detroit in July. If the rabbis who are present want to call for a conference at that time, I shall not oppose it."

The two younger men glanced at each other. "That's good enough for me," Rabbi Philipson said. "If you will draft the call for a conference, we shall have it published without your name. Then all of us will come together at Detroit and see whether we can agree on starting a permanent conference."

Dr. Wise agreed. "After all," he smiled as he spoke, "we did come together for three years as a Rabbinical Literary Association. Of course, literature is easier to discuss in peace than theology." Rabbi Wise leaned back in his chair and looked at David Philipson. "Our failure to start a permanent rabbinical conference in this country is one of the major disappointments of my life. When I think of the extreme individualism of our rabbis, I become very upset and deeply concerned about the future. What is the matter with us that we can't work together for the good of our sacred cause? Sometimes we are separated by genuine differences of conviction but I must say that often we are kept apart by trivial disagreements." He was silent for a moment, looking towards the ceiling as he rested his chin in hand, elbow on arm of his chair. "Well, perhaps the time for unity has come

at last, even if it be unity only among those who are not completely Orthodox in approach."

They left it at that and planned to meet in Detroit at Temple Beth El in July. Following the Council of the Union, thirty rabbis came together with Rabbi Philipson as chairman and Rabbi Henry Berkowitz as secretary. Rabbi Samuel Adler of New York was nominated for president. Once the conference was organized, however, and proceeded to the election of officers, Rabbi Adler was elected as honorary president and Isaac Mayer Wise was chosen unanimously as the real president. In spite of his strenuous protests, the colleagues insisted that the man who for over forty years had struggled to create unity and harmony among American rabbis should serve as the leader of the new group. Thus the Central Conference of American Rabbis was organized in 1889.

At the next meeting of the Conference in Cleveland, Rabbi Wise told his colleagues, "The united rabbis have undoubtedly the right . . . to declare and decide . . . which of our religious forms . . . are still living factors in our religious, ethical, and intellectual life. . . . The Conference is the lawful authority in all matters of form."

As Rabbi Wise had foreseen, the newly-established Central Conference of American Rabbis soon found many subjects to study and discuss for the guidance of the congregations. The aims of teaching in the religious schools, how to carry out the confirmation ceremony in the most meaningful way, rules regarding marriage customs and burial rites, the obligations to be placed on those seeking conversion to Judaism; these and many other subjects were

studied and acted upon by the rabbis now that they had an organization in which they could work together in unity.

One of the problems with which the rabbis had to deal was a rising of Jewish national feeling on the part of many people, especially those who suffered under oppression in eastern Europe. This feeling found organized form in the modern Zionist movement. The idea spread and became prominent in American Jewish life as Rabbi Wise neared his eightieth birthday. At the first World Congress of the movement held in Basle, Switzerland, in 1897, it was decided by Zionist leaders that the only solution for the problem of Jewish suffering in lands of oppression was: "to secure for the Jewish people a publicly recognized, legally secured home in Palestine." Within the ranks of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rabbi Wise opposed Zionism as a political movement designed to further a kind of Jewish nationalism. Although he favored migration of Jews who suffered inequality in various lands and their colonization in Palestine, as well as elsewhere, he never turned from his opposition to Zionism as such. He believed that Jews had the universal mission of teaching and bearing witness to the worship of the one God everywhere.



15. KNOW HOW TO ANSWER

DR. WISE WAS SEVENTY YEARS OLD WHEN THE CENTRAL Conference of American Rabbis was founded. He was blessed with good health and great vitality. Even though he had passed the mark of threescore years and ten, he continued his work at the College, presided over the affairs of the Conference, served his congregation and community, and edited *The Israelite*. He was rather stooped now, seemed a little less than his former medium height. He walked with a slight limp, and the walking-stick, which he had started carrying because he enjoyed it, was his constant companion. His rounded face and high forehead were framed with white hair, a beard of side whiskers and trimmed mustache. His chin was clean-shaven. He still perched his glasses high

on his forehead when he was not reading or writing, and he still looked out at the world through bright eyes, the keen gaze of which sometimes fixed one with their serious disapproval, sometimes invited to laughter by their merry smile.

The trips to Floral House were undertaken less often and only in good weather. Selma Wise, who was younger than her husband, tried to supervise his busy schedule and to keep him from walking about the streets from College to home to the business places of his members more than was necessary. She tried to take care of him and he loved her for it, but his youthful spirit still resisted the physical necessity of slowing down his long-established routine.

The members of Temple B'nai Yeshurun, the Plum Street Temple, were very proud of their famous rabbi and tried to help him take things more easily now that he was growing old. They engaged an assistant rabbi, Charles S. Levi, a graduate of the class of 1889, and released Rabbi Wise from most of his responsibilities at the Talmud Yelodim, the religious school of the congregation.

When he returned from the first session of the Conference in Detroit and admitted to Selma that he had been chosen as president of the new organization, she scolded him severely, "Isaac, I am ashamed of you. You should have had more sense. Here you are seventy years old and you let them push another responsibility on your shoulders. Why can't the younger men begin to take over the burden? Or perhaps you just don't care about me and the children, perhaps you're so miserable that you want to work yourself to death?"

"Now, Selma, please, you know that isn't true. I'll make you a promise. I am going to make the job easy for myself. I shall let the gentlemen of the Conference do everything while I shall sit silently in the chair. That's all there is to it except for an opening speech once a year," he paused and looked worried. "Now, don't get angry, there is one other little possibility. I shall have to prepare a report about the attitude of Reform Judaism towards the right of circumcision for those who seek to be converted to our faith. A simple matter . . . we believe only that they must promise to have future male children circumcised. That's all. Apart from that I promise you I shall do nothing."

Selma looked lovingly at her husband. "All right, Isaac, I know you won't keep your word. I know they'll find plenty for you to do and that you will do it. But, somehow, I don't know why, I can't seem to stay angry with you. Come, put on your slippers and smoking jacket, Mr. Newly-Elected President, I'm going to brew some tea."

Dr. Wise tried not to be too active in the Conference, but this proved to be impossible, just as Selma had predicted. At the annual meeting in 1892, it became apparent that the Conference, as the only official rabbinical body in the United States, should take on the task of representing Judaism at the great world's fair, to be called the Columbian Exposition, scheduled for the following year in Chicago. The rabbis at their annual Conference, held that year in New York, became excited as they began to realize what a great opportunity they would have to present Judaism on equal terms with all the branches of Christianity before the whole world.

Rabbi Wise was presiding. Two young colleagues asked for the floor at the same time. "I recognize Rabbi Silverman of New York." Rabbi Silverman got to his feet and said, "Mr. President and colleagues, I suspect that my classmate, Joseph Stolz, and I may have asked for the floor for the same purpose. There is only one among us who could represent Judaism adequately with respect to the all-important questions of theology and ethics. I refer, of course, to our leader, teacher and friend, the president of this Conference. I suggest that we therefore ask Rabbi Wise to prepare and present the two papers on these subjects." That settled the matter. Before he left for home Rabbi Wise had agreed to present the two topics and a third dealing with the Jewish Periodical Press.

When the College opened that fall for its eighteenth academic year, Dr. Wise enlisted the help of his students in preparing for the papers at the World's Parliament of Religions. One day in theology class, after he had taken roll, Rabbi Wise said, "All right, boys, settle down. Abram Gideon, do you think I can't see you just because I've lost my glasses? Let Bennett alone and sit down."

"Dr. Wise," Seymour Bottigheimer piped up from a seat in the last row, "your glasses are pushed up on your forehead."

"Never mind. I don't need glasses in order to see who is creating a disturbance. Good. That's better."

"I believe you boys, my students, can be of great help in preparing my presentation for the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. From time to time I propose that we convert this class into a quiz or question and answer period."

You ask me questions about the basic beliefs and practices of Judaism, the kind that non-Jews might like to know about. I shall try to answer briefly and to the point. In that way I should develop some good methods for my papers. Are you willing to help?"

"Of course, we'll help," the students agreed, "let's start now." Morris Newfield raised his hand in the first row. "Dr. Wise, since you will be speaking of theology, what are the sources for your thinking about religion?"

"A good question, Morris. Let me try to make a clear, brief answer. My sources are the Jewish concept of God, the Bible, and the use of my ability to reason."

"What are the main beliefs of Judaism?" asked George Solomon.

"I would say there are four. First of all: the existence of one God whom we worship. Then, the belief that there is a relationship between God and man, as when we speak of God revealing something to man, or man speaking to God in prayer. Next, we believe in living a good life as the commandment of God. And finally, we believe that there is some kind of life after death."

"What does Judaism have to say about the nature of man?" Abram Simon put the question.

"Man is created in the image of God. This means that every man has the ability, in greater or lesser degree, to be free, develop his understanding, do what is right, and hope for continued life after death. Man is able to perfect his character. If man is required by God to seek to perfect himself, then God has surely given him the means to do it if he tries with sincerity of heart."

David Marx jumped to his feet. "Dr. Wise," he called out, "you are speaking of God and man, but what of the Torah? Isn't the Torah important in Judaism?"

Dr. Wise tried not to smile at young David's excitement. "Indeed, it is, David. In one sense the Torah is the first five books of the Bible. Of course, those books have to be studied, interpreted, properly understood. Judaism, in its entirety, in its completion and perfection, centers in this very Torah. In a broader sense, Torah means the entire tradition which grew out of this basic constitution."

"But what about the Talmud, and other later sources of Judaism? Have they no authority?"

"Yes, in a way. Just as the later books of the Bible are a kind of commentary on the Torah, so the Talmud is a kind of commentary on the Bible. It has authority for us whenever its laws are in harmony with the spirit of the Torah, and in keeping with the dictates of reason. Otherwise, it is not binding on us."

Charles Fleischer continued this train of thought, "How would you answer a question about the relation of our Bible and what the Christians call the Old Testament?"

Rabbi Wise said, "I should simply say they are one and the same except where Christian versions have not translated the Hebrew text correctly. That is why we need a Jewish version of the Bible, of the books called the Old Testament."

"I want to know," Marcus Salzman broke in, "how you will deal with the assertion that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, that Judaism gave the world the Old Testament and then stopped creating."

Dr. Wise paused for a moment, fingered his gold watch chain, then answered, "Marcus, I shall have to state that whatever Christianity may be, it is not the fulfilment of Judaism. Judaism is its own fulfilment, as shown in the Talmud, the Midrash, the works of our commentators, philosophers, and poets; in short, as shown in over three thousand years of organic growth which Judaism has had from Abraham down to the present."

"What about repentance? If a man sins, how does he find forgiveness? And who will be saved? They will want to know that, whether we believe that just the Jews will be saved or others as well." Isaac Marcuson, a tall, quiet boy, had put these questions.

"We believe that the gates of repentance are always open. Man may sin by harming himself or others without meaning to, by harboring evil thoughts or intentions, and by evil deeds committed wilfully in disobedience to the laws of God. In all cases he must confess his sin before God, resolve to do better, show by his conduct the true nature of his repentance. If he does this he is assured of God's forgiveness. Since salvation depends upon sincere intention to obey God's laws, it follows that all righteous men are saved. One does not have to become a Jew to find a truly human fulfilment. All will find it who seek to live just and merciful lives."

"Then let me ask another question I know the people at Chicago will want you to deal with," Isaac Marcuson continued. "Do the Jews seek converts like the Christians?"

"The answer to that one follows from what I just said. Since we believe that people are judged by the caliber of

their lives instead of by the creeds they repeat, we see no need to convert the world to our particular form of religion. Judaism, however, does *accept* converts although we do not *seek* them. If a man or woman convinces the rabbi that he is sincere, if he studies Judaism carefully for some months, he may in time be accepted into the religious fellowship of Judaism through a ceremony of conversion. This happens from time to time, but it is not the result of a missionary campaign."

Isidore Rosenthal raised his hand. "Dr. Wise, I know a question you are bound to be asked. It may be hard to deal with, but you should be prepared."

"And what question is that, Isidore?"

"The question is: What is the Jewish view of Jesus?"

"You are right, Isidore, in the light of our history we must answer that question carefully but, of course, in truth. I shall tell them that we Jews think of Jesus as a great man, a teacher of religion in the tradition of the prophets of Israel. We do not think of him as God or as God's only son. Such ideas are foreign to Judaism. We agree with most, although not everything, that he is supposed to have said, and we honor him as a great religious personality through whose life and influence some of the truths of Judaism have been widely spread throughout the world."

Rabbi Wise took his watch from his vest pocket. "Boys, we are late in dismissing class. Thank you for being so helpful. We shall do this from time to time so that I may prepare my papers for the World's Parliament of Religions in a way that will interest the people and in a form that will be short and to the point."

When the train for the World's Fair arrived at the station in Chicago, each member of the Wise family had something to carry. Rabbi Wise took one valise and gave a large suitcase to Jonah, a smaller one to his twin sister Regina. Elsie, who was already a teen-ager, carried a round hat box, while Selma Wise took care of little Isaac, Jr., who had a stuffed dog with sad-looking ears tucked under his arm. Selma carried her purse, several packages, and a small folding canvas chair. She knew that her husband, seventy-four years old, would want to see everything at the Fair. She insisted on taking the chair along so that he would not be worn out from walking and standing all day.

"Step along, now," the rabbi warned, "don't let any runners take the bags. We'll keep right on going until we find the omnibus for the Auditorium Hotel."

The locomotive hissed steam and belched black, sooty smoke, breathing heavily after the long trip, as the Wise family went along the platform at the railway station. They paid no attention to the calls of the runners who tried to grab their bags and entice them into hacks going to other hotels or boarding houses. They saw the big omnibus marked "Auditorium House." Here they surrendered the baggage and climbed aboard for the ride to the hotel.

In their rooms, they cleaned up and prepared to set out for their first visit to the exposition. Everyone had his own ideas about what he wanted to see, everyone except little Isaac, who wanted to see everything but who stayed close to Selma in the confusion. "I want to ride on the ferris wheel and see the shows on the Midway Plaisance," Jonah said firmly. "Daddy," Elsie broke in, "may we see them

demonstrate the Audiphone? They say it is a new instrument which enables the deaf to hear through their teeth. Imagine hearing through your teeth!" she said, laughing.

"Enough, enough!" the rabbi said. "We are going to see everything, or at least as much as we can in the time we have. I want to see the Kinetograph. It shows pictures while a phonograph plays. If that thing works, we soon won't need rabbis. Just put on the Kinetograph and you will see the preacher while you hear the sermon. I especially want to visit the Transportation Building to see the newest palace cars and the Baltimore and Ohio exhibit, 'Railways of the World.' Well, if you're all ready, let's set off."

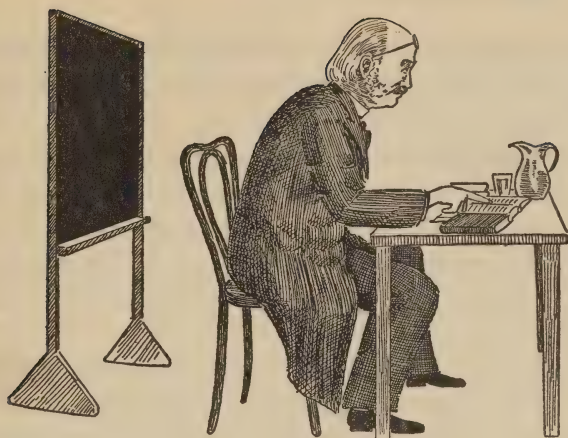
They took a horse cab through the thick traffic of Chicago to the fairgrounds on the South Side. Inside the Exposition, Rabbi Wise said, "I am hungry. If I am hungry, I know you children are famished. Here is the Austrian Village, where I am told the food is good. Would you like to eat there?"

Everyone agreed and Rabbi Wise asked for a table for six. "My dear," he said to Selma, once they were seated, "I am informed by the official guidebook that each of these charming girls who wait on table 'has bound herself by a contract drawn with Spartan severity to pursue her calling without interruption from the time the Fair opens until it is closed.'"

"But why should they be interrupted?" Selma asked.

"Judging from the way these dandies at the tables look at them," her husband replied with a smile, "I should think there might be many interruptions." Selma blushed, her cheeks taking on a deep rose color. "Isaac, at your age, and in front of the children. Please!"

For several days the family took in the fabulous sights of the Exposition. Then came the opening of the World's Parliament of Religions, and Rabbi Wise went through the light grey stone arches of the magnificent Art Palace, one of the largest buildings in the Exposition, built in Grecian style. Dressed in his black broadcloth suit and wearing a snowy-white shirt with stiff collar and white tie, he looked every inch the venerable sage as he ascended the platform, opened his manuscript, and began his lecture on "The Theology of Judaism." As he warmed to his subject he noted how attentive were the people who filled the large hall and, he thought to himself with great satisfaction, "Those boys did a good job when they helped me prepare my lecture."



16. LAST DAY IN SCHOOL

AS HE APPROACHED HIS EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY ISAAC MAYER WISE continued the daily round of customary activity. One day in the fall of the year he said good-bye to Selma and the children, took a hack to the depot and went by train to Peoria. There he had a very busy day visiting the grave of his mother, Regina, dedicating a new temple and installing Rabbi Charles S. Levi, his former assistant, as spiritual leader of the congregation.

Rabbi Wise spent the Sabbath in Peoria and left Saturday night for Chicago. Rabbi Levi stood on the station platform, looking up at his teacher as the train started to move. "Take care of yourself, sir," he called out, "please don't try to do too much."

"Don't worry," the old man waved at his young colleague, "all I have to do in Chicago is receive a substantial gift for the College."

The long trip to meet the benefactor of the College proved of no avail, for the man did not make the gift. But Rabbi Wise met many old friends and gladly turned over a spadeful of dirt at the ceremony of laying the corner-stone of Temple Isaiah where young Rabbi Joseph Stolz was the spiritual leader.

Sunday night, Rabbi Wise returned home to be on hand for the opening of the preparatory department of the College and to officiate at the marriage ceremony of a young couple in his congregation.

The marriage of Sheldon Kahn and Anita Shulman was a very special occasion. Although tired from his trip, Rabbi Wise was glad of the opportunity to officiate for them. Both of the young people came of Cincinnati families of long association with Temple B'nai Yeshurun. He had officiated at the marriages of their parents and had confirmed both of them. From the pulpit he noticed how many faithful members of the congregation had assembled for the wedding.

After Sheldon had taken his place before the rabbi, and Anita had been escorted down the aisle by her father, Rabbi Wise began the wedding ceremony. "*Boruch habo b'shem Adonoi*, Blessed are you who come in the name of the Lord. Sheldon and Anita, before I proceed with the ceremony which will unite your lives in marriage, let me speak a personal word to you. My heart is very full today. Having known your dear parents for so many years and you since you were born, I am privileged and blessed to be able to speak

the words of consecration at the time of your marriage. As I think back over the years, I recall how hard it was for young people to marry in my native land where the government put obstacles in the way of young couples. Here we live in freedom and it is my hope that you will establish a true home in Israel, a home in which this freedom will be used by you for the sanctification of your lives in devoted service to God, your dear ones, and your fellow men. . . .”

Rabbi Wise continued with the ceremony: the sharing of the cup of wine, the exchange of rings, the blessing at the end. As he lowered his arms after the benediction, while the newly married couple embraced, he thought, “It is good that we have built a strong home for our faith in America.”

On the morning of the Sabbath of March 24, 1900, Rabbi Wise preached the sermon at the Plum Street Temple as usual. His text that day was the priestly benediction, “*Y'vorech'cho Adonoi v'yish m'recho. . . .* May the Lord bless thee and keep thee. . . .” He spoke very well that morning. The people felt that although their rabbi had grown somewhat weaker physically because of his advanced age, the message of his mind and spirit was as clear and eloquent as ever. He spoke of the meaning of God's grace through which the blessing comes to men. At the end of the service he invoked the blessing upon his people, asking that God endow them with inner strength, and courage and wisdom. After the benediction many friends gathered about him, to greet him affectionately, and to wish him and each other a Good Shabos, a happy and blessed Sabbath day.

Rabbi Wise then went home for Sabbath dinner with the family. He was bright and cheerful as he asked God's bless-

ing over the *chalo*, the twisted loaf of the Sabbath, "*Boruch ato Adonoi*. . . Praised be Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who bringest forth bread from the earth."

The family had just begun to eat when Jonah, now a young man of nineteen and a student at the College, spoke up, "Father, I am going to turn the tables on you today. After all, they say that what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

Rabbi Wise looked at him with upraised eyebrow. "Indeed. Perhaps so. I am fond of goose, but it so happens this is chicken which your mother has prepared. But speak on. I must listen respectfully to what a future colleague has to say."

Jonah continued, "Father, I know that for some time now you have not written out your sermons, in spite of the fact," he stressed the words, "that you tell us students that we must write out every word before preaching. Is that right?"

"You are right, Jonah," the rabbi looked with pride towards Selma, "but please consider how much more practice I have had."

"Nevertheless, I want you to know that several people, myself included, were moved by your sermon this morning. Please write it out so that we may have it for the future."

Dr. Wise thanked Jonah and agreed to write out the sermon. After dinner was over he rested for a while and then took hat, coat, and cane and set off for the College where he was accustomed to lecture to a class for an hour before the Sabbath afternoon chapel service.

The students were waiting and Rabbi Wise sat behind a

table on the low platform at the front of the classroom. He spoke to the class, answered several questions, and dismissed the students in time for the chapel service.

Students and faculty had already begun to assemble in the chapel upstairs when one of the younger boys, walking along the corridor, looked into the classroom where Dr. Wise had been teaching. He saw the founder of the College still seated in his chair, head and shoulders slumped forward on the table, his right hand dangling over the edge. Horrified, the boy shouted and ran for help. Jonah and the others came, a doctor was summoned, and carefully they carried the partially conscious teacher to his home.

The stroke was a blow from which Rabbi Wise never rallied. The doctor did what he could, but gradually the rabbi lost consciousness. He slept peacefully while Selma and the children kept their vigil that night and throughout Sunday and Monday. Just after the sun had set on Monday evening, as the peace of night settled over the earth, Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise departed from this world to enter the portals of the Academy on High.

On Thursday the funeral service was held in Temple B'nai Yeshurun. The sanctuary was crowded by those who had come to join the family in the final tribute to the man whose life had meant so much to them and to all who had found new meaning in their religious tradition because of his courage and devoted labor. Rabbi David Philipson opened the service with prayer and the assistant rabbi of the temple, Louis Grossmann, spoke movingly of the life and achievement of his great teacher. Members of the senior class at the Hebrew Union College reverently carried the coffin

in the funeral procession and the final commitment service was read by Rabbi Charles S. Levi at the cemetery. Most of the business houses in Cincinnati closed their doors during his funeral as a token of respect to the revered teacher of Judaism whose influence had made of their city the center of Jewish learning and life in America.

There was a memorial service at the Hebrew Union College during which Professor Moses Mielziner likened Rabbi Wise to Rabbi Yochanan *ben*, the son of, Zakkai. Rabbi Yochanan had founded the school at Yavneh before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 C.E. As a center of Jewish faith and culture that school had already survived the fall of the Roman Empire by fifteen hundred years. The school which Rabbi Wise had founded in Cincinnati was also destined to outlive many empires of this world.

Professor Mielziner pointed out that the disciples of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had called him the "light of Israel, the right hand pillar, the powerful hammer." Just so, he went on to explain, Rabbi Wise had spread light by his teaching and had upheld the household of Israel as a stout pillar supports a structure. He then added:

Kind, gentle, yielding, almost childlike in personal intercourse with everyone, Dr. Wise wielded a pen that was often like a mighty hammer when it combated antagonistic opinions, or repelled attacks from within or from without; not personal attacks—for such he mostly ignored—but attacks upon that which he considered right, just, true and holy. But "When wise men destroy, it is for the purpose of building up."

How well Dr. Wise built up the religious life of the Jewish community in America is now well known. His achievement is summarized very briefly in the epitaph carved on the simple shaft and headstone which mark his grave in the United Jewish Cemetery in Walnut Hills, a suburb of Cincinnati:

ISAAC M. WISE

Born in Steingrub, Bohemia, March 29, 1819

Died March 26, 1900

Rabbi of K. K. Bene Yeshurun

Founder of

THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS

THE HEBREW UNION COLLEGE

THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

EPILOGUE—Mr. Levy Goes to Temple

THE TIME IS THE PRESENT. IT IS A BRIGHT BUT CHILLY SATURDAY morning in March. Mr. Levy, whose home is in Hyannis, on Cape Cod, is in Cincinnati on a trip devoted half to business, half to pleasure. People on the Cape work very hard during the summer months to satisfy the tourists who throng their beautiful area of the country. During the winter and spring the year-round residents rest and make preparations for the next busy season. Since Mr. Levy is a member of the temple at Hyannis he is aware that this particular Sabbath is marked by the special observance of Isaac Mayer Wise Memorial Sabbath in all Reform congregations. Being in Cincinnati at the time, it seemed a good opportunity to take part in the occasion in the very congregation which

Dr. Wise had served for so long, the Plum Street Temple, also known as the Isaac Mayer Wise Temple.

As he walked through the doors of the temple that Sabbath morning, Mr. Levy heard the notes of the magnificent organ as a prelude was being played. He was ushered to a seat near the middle of the spacious, vaulted, colorful sanctuary and joined with the others who had come early for silent devotion.

Mr. Levy could not help thinking about how much indebted he was to the man whose memory was called to mind by this Sabbath observance. Take the temple structure, itself, as an example. This beautiful Moorish type of building with its towers and arched doorways, as well as hundreds of other stately synagogues throughout the country, was a visible reminder of the strength of the movement which Rabbi Wise had founded and led. Of course, and he smiled as he thought of the comparison, his own temple on Cape Cod was not much like the one in which he now sat. Styles change and building costs are so high that the present-day synagogue tends to be more functional, with no wasted space, and a more restrained use of ornamentation. His own temple was built in American colonial style with a great amount of simple wooden surface inside and out, unadorned, but possessed of a trim beauty in its very simplicity. Since the end of the Second World War, he mused, a great many new temples have been built throughout the entire country. Many of these make use of contemporary trends in architecture, dotting the American landscape with new examples of the old Biblical command that we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. "I wonder how Rabbi Wise would

have liked some of these very modern structures," he thought. "In any case, the synagogue buildings of America are a sign of the vitality of the movement which he started."

As the organist played on softly, Mr. Levy thought about the struggle which preceded the use of organ music in synagogues. The opponents of Dr. Wise had stated that if such an instrument should break down, one would be tempted to repair it, and that would involve people in working on the Sabbath. They had also pointed out that there had been an organ in the ancient Temple destroyed by the Romans. They held it would be improper to have an organ in any other temple since all Jews were supposed still to mourn the ancient destruction. Mr. Levy did not remember the details of the old struggle, but he did know that Rabbi Wise had not prayed for the rebuilding of the ancient Temple with its hereditary priestly caste and its cult of animal sacrifice. The idea of using instrumental music to beautify the service certainly had caught on since so many congregations, many of them Conservative as well as Reform, now followed the example of Rabbi Wise and made use of organ music.

Across the aisle from where Mr. Levy was sitting, a family was ushered to seats. There they were, husband, wife, and two children, a boy about sixteen and a girl about ten, all dressed up in their Sabbath best. "Yes, it seems so natural and right nowadays," he reflected. "But what a fight there was when Dr. Wise first introduced family pews in Albany and Cincinnati over a hundred years ago. The feathers flew then . . . and they still do. Didn't I read something just the other day about a rabbi in Jerusalem who wrote to one in Chicago urging him to continue the separation of men and

women in the synagogue, even though his own people wanted the arrangement changed? Even our Orthodox brethren in some congregations now permit women to sit with the men during services. It has become the common practice in Conservative synagogues. Of course, people are entitled to do it the way they prefer. But I wonder what progress Judaism would have made in America if Rabbi Wise had not fought for the emancipation of women, their equal position in the temples. Were it not for the successful issue of that struggle, we would not now have our National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. The synagogue would have remained the sacred concern of men alone, and family worship would have been impossible."

The rabbi appeared on the pulpit, garbed in a simple black robe and white *talis*, or prayer-shawl. He opened his prayer book and announced that the Sabbath morning service would begin on page one hundred three. The congregation arose, Mr. Levy with the rest. They joined the choir in singing, "Early will I seek Thee, God, My Refuge Strong." After the opening hymn, the rabbi led the congregation in several prayers. Mr. Levy could not keep his mind fixed entirely on the prayers. Everyone seemed to take things for granted. Did they think it had been a simple thing to prepare a prayer book suitable for American congregations, a book that spanned the ages from the Psalms of the Bible to compositions by contemporary rabbis? Mr. Levy had heard of the old attempts to accomplish this, how Dr. Wise had prepared his *Minhag America*, American Prayer Custom, and how he had withdrawn it as soon as the Central Conference of American Rabbis had published the *Union Prayer-*

book. "Surely, it is not perfect," he thought, "but it does represent a great achievement." He brought his attention back to the service. . . .

Praised be Thy holy name. Thou hast made
Thine eternal law our portion, and hast given
us a goodly heritage. Open our eyes to the
beauty of Thy truth and help us so to ex-
emplify it in our lives that we may win all
men for Thy law of righteousness. Gather
all Thy children around the banner of Thy
truth that Thy name may be hallowed
through us in all the world and the entire
human family be blessed with truth and
peace. Amen.

The congregation arose and the rabbi said, "*Bor'chu es Adonoi ham'voroch*. . . . Praise ye the Lord to whom all praise is due. Praised be the Lord to whom all praise is due forever and ever." Then the chazan sang the Hebrew response in traditional style. This set Mr. Levy to thinking about the strange fact that it was the Reform movement in Judaism that had established the first school for training cantors in the New World, the Hebrew Union School of Sacred Music in New York. It had done this although Rabbi Wise had found it advisable in his day to augment the music of the cantor with that of the choir, thus reducing somewhat the role which the cantor played in the traditional service.

"Perhaps it's not so strange after all," he reflected. "We have to remember that many of the cantors he knew in the old days in this country were as ignorant of music as they were of Judaism. Although he retained the services of a cantor, Rabbi Wise decided to develop the congregational

choir as the central feature of the musical service. Now that we have the facilities to train cantors thoroughly in music and in Judaism, we are able to graduate men who restore the ancient modal forms of synagogue music without the Roumanian folk-songs and snatches of Grand Opera which Rabbi Wise disliked in the temple. Here, too, our Conservative friends have taken up the new idea and have established a modern school for cantorial training."

After the Sh'ma and the *K'dusho*, the rabbi led the congregation in other prayers. Mr. Levy joined in fervently, especially when they came to the prayer including the words: "Purify our hearts that we may serve Thee in truth." Soon it was time for the reading of Scripture. The president of the congregation, the rabbi and the cantor approached the Ark, over which was suspended a beautiful *ner tomid*, eternal light. The rabbi took out the scroll of the Torah. The president of the congregation recited the appropriate blessings and the rabbi read from the scroll. There was no auctioning of honors and no mention of money. Mr. Levy recalled how it had been done before some of the changes introduced by Dr. Wise. In those days the people had spent the time of the Torah reading visiting with one another or taking a walk outside in decent weather.

"Not their fault, either," he thought, "since they could not understand what was going on and the service took about four or five hours. Dr. Wise taught us that what matters about prayer is the sincerity of our intentions, not the length of our devotions."

The haftoro, portion from the prophets, for that Sabbath, included these verses from Jeremiah:

Thus saith the Lord:
 Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,
 Neither let the mighty man glory in his might,
 Let not the rich man glory in his riches;
 But let him that glorieth glory in this,
 That he understandeth and knoweth Me,
 That I am the Lord who exerciseth mercy,
 Justice, and righteousness, in the earth;
 For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

After the Torah was returned to the Ark and the prayer for the government and the President of the United States had been offered, the choir sang an anthem. Then the rabbi came forward from his seat to the lectern and looked out at the people silently for a moment before beginning his sermon.

"Dear friends," the rabbi addressed the congregation, "this Sabbath is set aside in our congregation and in other Liberal temples throughout the land as a time when it is incumbent upon us to recall the life and work of a great man and devoted rabbi, Isaac Mayer Wise. The observance of this occasion is filled with more meaning here in this very congregation and pulpit where Rabbi Wise ministered for nearly half a century than anywhere else. Still, his name is known and revered throughout the entire country and in broad areas of the whole world. Wherever Jews meet in free and creative fashion to carry on the tradition of their fathers in forms that are suitable and meaningful for their own time and place, there the name of Isaac Mayer Wise is held in highest esteem.

"Truly, he was the kind of wise man referred to by the prophet Jeremiah in the passage we read this morning. He

had scant patience with those—and there were many such in those days as well as now—who gloried in their wisdom, power or material wealth. In his own life he cut through all such temptations to come to the heart of the matter, to seek to know and understand God as the One who demands mercy, justice, and righteousness in life. He had the vision to understand that if Judaism were to survive in the New World it would have to be led by men who would put knowledge of God and practice of mercy and justice at the very center of their lives as Jews. He had the courage to defy those who held fast to old ways of doing things just because they exhibited the patina of age, and he laid a keen-edged axe to the dead trunk of habit for habit's sake. But he destroyed so as to clear the ground for building up. How well he built is attested by the life of this congregation and the enduring character of the national institutions which he founded, all, in truth, devoted to the quest for knowledge of God and the ever-wider dissemination of the faith and ethic of Judaism."

"It is really remarkable," thought Mr. Levy, "how the work of this man has influenced the life of every American Jew. A Reform congregation like this makes possible a modern expression of the classic functions of the synagogue. Our ancestors founded the synagogue in the first place so that they and their children would be able to worship God under the changed circumstances of their time and place. Babylonia was different than Judah, even as Hyannis or Cincinnati is different from Babylonia. But the need for worship, teaching the tradition, finding a center where people can meet one another and form friendships, all these

remain pretty much the same. The religious school and the social affairs of Sisterhood, Men's Club and Youth group help fulfil basic Jewish needs along with the temple program of worship. Our congregations also follow Dr. Wise's lead in having an outreach to a wider community. Every civic group working for a better America and a more stable and prosperous world has found allies and helpers among our rabbis and the members of Liberal congregations. The lives of countless people in urban areas like Kansas City, Chicago, and Nashville are better and happier because our congregations have joined with other groups to help build a better society."

While Mr. Levy was still thinking about the effects of vital congregational life, the rabbi moved on to describe and assess the national institutions which Dr. Wise had founded and to which he had given so much in personal leadership. "Here again," meditated Mr. Levy, "the wisdom and foresight of the man come through so clearly. Rabbi Wise knew that the best congregation could not carry on all alone. For a quarter of a century he tried to bring the leaders of the congregations together. He finally succeeded when the Union was founded. This very celebration of Isaac Mayer Wise Sabbath is the result of Union planning and publication."

Mr. Levy had visited the impressive House of Living Judaism, the national headquarters of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, during one of his business trips to New York. He thought about it now as he listened to the rabbi's sermon. "Rabbi Wise could never have imagined everything which is done there in the fields of synagogue

activity, religious school planning, social action, the working out of programs for Sisterhood, Men's Clubs, and Youth Leagues.

"In the field of publications alone the Union has changed the whole course of Jewish religious education in this country. Books are so carefully planned, written, edited, and illustrated that the textbooks and other printed materials which emerge compare favorably with those used in public schools. Many Conservative as well as Liberal congregations make use of these publications, a very different situation from that which obtained before the Union began. In those days religious school teachers had to write their own lessons, doing the best they could as individuals. Then they would mail them from city to city so as to help each other with the difficult problem of preparing lessons."

Mr. Levy continued to reflect on some of the work he had learned was in process of being done at the House of Living Judaism. "Today, a local congregation can get all kinds of help from the Union. There are experts prepared to share what they have learned about temple administration, fundraising and building problems. There are even sets of plans drawn by architects to help members of building committees in congregations that plan on erecting new synagogues. It's very different from the old days. Still, it all follows logically and directly from the Union which Rabbi Wise started."

The rabbi spoke of the Hebrew Union College and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. "A similar situation obtains with respect to these institutions," thought Mr. Levy. "A college where rabbis could study the Jewish tradi-

tion in an atmosphere of American freedom was one of Rabbi Wise's most cherished dreams. It came into being two years after the Union was founded and Rabbi Wise served as its president for a quarter century until his death. But the College of today does a great deal more than it did during the lifetime of its founder. In addition to having trained hundreds of rabbis now serving throughout the world, the College engages in basic scholarly research in the history of Jews and Judaism. Cantors and temple educators prepare for their life work at the College and there are many Christian clergymen as well who complete their graduate study at the institution which Dr. Wise started on a much more modest scale.

"As for the Conference," Mr. Levy's thought kept pace with the major points in the rabbi's sermon, "there we have the organization which prepared and published the very prayer book and hymnal which we are using this morning. But the most important thing about the Conference is the fact that hundreds of rabbis are united in fellowship and find help in pursuing their interests in Judaism and in related fields like social justice, world peace, and the problem of the relationship of church and state. Rabbi Wise had to deal with these same problems," thought Mr. Levy, "and I am sure he would have been deeply gratified if he could have lived to see how many of his spiritual disciples now seek to follow along the paths which he opened up as a pioneer in the cause of American Judaism."

Even though Mr. Levy had given his own thoughts free rein and had not followed the remarks of the rabbi as closely as he usually did, he felt that it had been a good sermon,

and he murmured "Amen" along with the rabbi when he concluded.

After the adoration prayer and the Kaddish, just before the benediction, the congregation arose to sing a hymn in unison. The hymn which the rabbi had chosen for that day was one for which Rabbi Wise, himself, had written the words. "This is very appropriate," thought Mr. Levy, as he opened his *Union Hymnal* and cleared his throat to join in the singing after the organ introduction.

"Let there be light," at dawn of time,
The Lord of Hosts proclaimed,
"Let there be light," this call sublime
Went forth when Horeb flamed,
Then broke on Israel's mind a day,
Illumined by a heavenly ray.

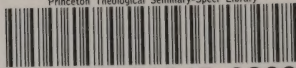
And since that hour the light has grown
In fullness more and more;
It shall increase till all shall own
One God and Him adore;
And strive to know His righteous will
And His commandments to fulfill.

As the last notes of the organ died away Mr. Levy stood with head bowed while the rabbi asked God's benediction on the congregation. "How much we owe," thought Mr. Levy, "to the life and work of the man known as Isaac Mayer Wise."

[illegible]

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